# ABSTRACT

Gabriel Chilcott, GREATER THAN THE PARTS: HOW SCHOOL LEADERS AND CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATORS BUILD COHERENCE AND TRUST (Under the direction of Dr. Matthew Militello). Department of Educational Leadership, May 2023

School districts are highly complex organizations. Leaders often feel frustrated by the failure of improvement efforts that are built with rational if-then structures when the intended goals are not met. During the design phase of this Participatory Action Research study, a group of Co-Practitioner Researchers (CPR) highlighted Trust and Coherence as essential considerations for leaders building innovative improvement plans. The Focus Of Practice (FOP) of this study is how school leaders and central office administrators build trust and coherence between and among each other and foster innovation. I designed collaborative gatherings using Improvement Science and Community Learning Exchange methodologies. The CPR from a Northern California public school district took part in three cycles of inquiry to explore Trust and Coherence. Over 18 months from 2021–2022, I designed activities and gathered data from Learning Exchanges, 1:1 Interviews, and Reflective Memos in order to answer the research questions developed to explore the FOP.

Analysis of open and axial coding is at the heart of this dissertation and indicates that efforts to build trust and coherence are often thwarted by the churn of educator turnover and the gravity of the status quo. By exploring the relationship between school and central office leadership, the co-practitioners and I found actions that counter these adverse outcomes. Study findings show that school leaders at all levels can create outcomes that are *Greater than the Parts* by attending to building Trust and Coherence. Specifically, the co-practitioner researchers in this study found six Critical Levers that leaders can use to build Trust and Coherence between and among school leaders and central office administrators. The three Critical Levers for

increasing Trust are Proximity, Support, and Vulnerability. Vision, Alignment, and Systems are the three Critical Levers for increasing Coherence. This study highlights these Critical Levers as key considerations that leaders can use to design improvement plans that increase Trust and Coherence between and among school leaders and central office administrators. The study findings have implications for leaders at all levels of educational organizations.

GREATER THAN THE PARTS:
HOW SCHOOL LEADERS AND CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATORS
BUILD COHERENCE AND TRUST

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**DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving and lovely wife Christine and our daughters

Preston and Wren. Everything always for you.

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# CHAPTER 1: FOCUS OF PRACTICE

*Be careful what you wish for; you may get it. This phrase flashed in my mind as I found myself responsible for a system that is stifling school innovation. Two weeks after accepting the director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment position, the chief academic officer invited me to a meeting on curricular flexibility. Although I was nominally over curriculum, I took a passive stance, as I was unsure of the issues. The tension seemed to spark out of the Zoom room as the meeting progressed. A central office administrator led the discussion, and the principals on the call politely followed the structures of the overly constructed agenda. Still, it was clear from their faces that they were waiting for their turn to speak the truth. Once there was a pause, one principal spoke up, "In the middle of a pandemic with teachers learning to teach remotely, you are seriously asking us to implement two curricula? How can we ask teachers to do more? Why?" There were some unsatisfactory answers about Williams legislation, adopted curricula, and the efficacy of the ELA curriculum. These school administrators had hustled to find funds to implement a curriculum they believed would better serve their communities. Yet, I spent an hour participating as a central office administrator in a meeting where the central office stifled innovation. These site leaders leveraged their relationships to get staff excited about implementing curriculum and changing instruction, only to have central office leaders push them back toward the institutional norm and a hierarchy of one-size-fits-all curricular choices imposed from above. Although I played a relatively passive role in this meeting, accepting this new position placed me in singular ownership of a repressive system. I clicked out of that meeting, knowing I would dismantle this system and that this was likely a window into greater truths about how school districts stymie innovation and a related window into how leaders can build trust and coherence.*

## Introduction

The idea for this research study grew from my desire to understand how site leaders (principals, vice principals, and instructional coaches) and central office administrators build coherence and trust between and among each other and foster innovation. Improving teaching and learning district-wide is a systems problem that is solved more easily through collaboration between central office administrators and site leadership (Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012). For this study, I use the descriptors build and increase interchangeably. The theory of action that undergirds this qualitative research is that *if* coherence and trust are built between and among school leaders and central office administrators, *then* the required conditions to foster innovation will improve. For this study, I define trust using the five facets defined in the work of Tschannen-Moran: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness (Tschannen-

Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). For this study, I use the definition of coherence found in *The Internal Coherence Framework*. The authors define coherence as the collective capability of the adults in a school building or an educational system to connect and align resources to carry out improvement strategies (Forman et al., 2018).

The opening vignette is an example of how central office administrators' influence can diminish levels of trust and inhibit innovation in the name of greater coherence. The friction between the site leaders and central office administrators was evident in this meeting. This friction indicated a profound lack of trust between and among the instructional leaders in schools and the central office administrators who support their work. Sitting in that curricular flexibility meeting, I found the disjointed nature of central office administrative help capricious and counterproductive to school-level leaders' innovation and student academic improvement. I came away from the meeting with the focus of practice for this study.

The meeting also highlighted an entrenched equity issue. The schools in the forum had high percentages of disadvantaged students, students of color, and students identified as English learners. These dedicated leaders responded to school-level needs by finding curricula that served their communities better. Central office administrators overlaid a control system over the desire to implement an alternative curriculum rather than embrace the innovation and allow the sites to iterate and improve.

The Focus of Practice (FOP) for this research study is how school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust. Bryk et al. (2015) propose that rushing to solutions before fully understanding the problem is counterproductive. They suggest that a deep understanding of the problem or issue can lead to more substantial reform efforts. For this

project, I adapted the problem of practice proposed by Bryk et al. (2015) to an FOP, a more positive framing, while still creating a method to structure a project around addressing an observed dilemma or challenge. In this case, the dilemma is that central office administrators mandated that school leaders implement two mathematics curricula that marginalized school-level context and decision-making. Witnessing the top-down heavy-handedness of central office administrators made me want to understand how to build coherence and trust between and among school leaders and central office administrators. Thus, my overarching research question is: How do school and central office administrators build trust and coherence between and among each other and foster innovation?

The remainder of the introductory chapter includes the rationale for the FOP, the assets and challenges associated with the FOP, and the significance that this project has on educational practices, policies, and further educational research. I explain how I ground this Participatory Action Research (PAR) project in equitable practices. I further explore the research questions and several sub-questions that guide the project before finishing the chapter with the ethical considerations.

## Rationale

I was a site principal for 10 years in the Northern California Unified School District, where the study takes place. Two years ago, I assumed the role of Director. Perhaps that is why this meeting was so striking. My experience has been that principals and teachers work directly with the students and are closer to the core mission of instruction and student learning. I do not believe that one-size-fits-all approaches for school improvement work. School-based leadership teams do not need discussions around compliance; they need to partner with central office administrators and each other.

In this study, I explored issues that stem from strict compliance to ensure coherence. The top-down central office approach is often employed to counter a narrative of failure in schools (Grubb, 2010; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2007). Leaders may respond to the perception of a lack of action with an overly simplistic hierarchical theory of change that is easily understood, if not easily implemented. I found the meeting where I witnessed central office administrators getting in the way of context-driven innovation jarring. I designed this project to explore how school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust between and among each other and foster innovation.

Freire (2000) frames prescriptive choices as the imposition of one person's will on another. The patterns of central control replicating unequal outcomes remain the default structure in this Northern California Unified School District. This control indicates a lack of trust in local innovation and diminishes local leaders' trust in the central office. This diminishing trust hampers innovation and may lead to overly proscribed coherence in the name of school improvement (Spillane et al., 2004). Distributing leadership and allowing more local decision-making within a distributed frame can lead to coherence and trust, encouraging more significant innovation (Harris et al., 2007). Freire (2000) discusses how society continues to normalize its systems back to those of domination. Leaders can build organizational coherence and trust to disrupt the current norm of inequitable outcomes (Eubanks et al., 1997; Freire, 2000; Muhammad, 2018; Paris, 2012).

Fostering innovation is an issue of importance nationwide. This research project focuses on how school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust. I first thought about this project's scope when dissonance surfaced during a meeting between central office administrators attempting to establish a system of curricular flexibility and principals who found

the system overly directive and restrictive. In detailing the focus of practice and the rationale, I demonstrated why this project is vital to this particular district and schools across the country. In the following section, I explore the assets and challenges of the FOP that surfaced during an informal Learning Exchange (LE). I adapted the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) framework to a smaller coming together of district leaders and referred to these meetings as Learning Exchanges throughout this dissertation. A CLE is a structure for bringing people together for collaborative learning that emerged from the research of Guajardo et al. (2016).

### Analysis of Assets & Challenges

I designed a Learning Exchange (LE) to bring district and school leaders together to explore the assets and challenges influencing the focus of practice (FOP). The FOP of this project is how school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust. I chose to work with leaders from Marble Elementary School (MES), as they were an experienced leadership team implementing the Illustrative Mathematics (IM) curriculum. I selected schools implementing IM to give us a common area of interest for coming together and collaborating. The study's goal was not IM-specific, but building discussion around a specific adoption offered rich discussion spaces. Initially, I only planned on working with the MES leadership team for the pre-study planning but ultimately selected them as one of the three focal schools. The district math coach was also in attendance and would be a member of the research group for this study.

I planned the LE with the goals of building relational trust, exploring the historical context of the alternative curricula work, mapping existing assets and challenges, and further defining the scope and sequence of this PAR project. I adapted the fishbone needs analysis tool espoused by Bryk et al. (2015) and updated by Rosenthal (2019) to include assets and challenges at the micro level (school), meso level (organizational), and macro level (broader context).

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During the LE, participants utilized a think-matching protocol to identify factors influencing this project (see Figure 1).

**Macro-Level Assets & Challenges**

During the Learning Exchange (LE), leaders explored macro-level assets and challenges, which were broader context or policies and practices outside of the control of the district and schools. California COVID guidelines did not allow Northern California schools to open in-person schooling, so distance learning was a macro-level factor that the LE team saw as an asset and a challenge. On the one hand, teaching is a social discipline that benefits from being together in person, but distance learning requires teachers to rethink instruction. One site administrator said they were planning as though it was their first year of teaching, and that this was an asset because instruction was centered in such a fashion that the planning was much more intentional. The LE team determined that this may extend to more robust long-term teacher planning practices. One major challenge was the intersection of financial and emotional stress on the family and community systems by COVID-19 and the resulting shutdown.

**Meso-Level Assets & Challenges**

District central office leadership encouraged "Pioneer Projects" five years earlier, which were Communities Of Practice (COPs) on common areas of study. Participants felt that participating in these COPs increased coherence and trust. During the LE, participants further identified that this process changed the way that schools thought about change by giving educators "permission to think outside the box" (AJ, LE, January 18, 2020). Interestingly, low scores on state assessment data had an aspect that the group saw as an asset to their work because they saw the low scores as a way to leverage more resources to sites. The principal, A. Jones,

| Micro Asset | | | | Meso Asset | | Macro Asset | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Committed Staff | Teacher Turnover (school-specific) | Excited Students | Vision --> Goals --> Aligment | Pioneer Projects | "Showcase" school for the district | Distance Learning | Black Lives Matter |
| Strong Leadership Team | Restraints in Curricular Flexibility | Culture of adult learning | | Relatively Low proficiency scores and growth in scores | Consistent, aligned leadership | | |
| Funding partnerships | District oversight | Opportunities for high-quality PD | | Central Turnover and dissonance | | | |
| | | | | | | Stress on family and community systems | Financial Restraints |
| Invested Community | Attendance | Engagement in DL | | Poorly Aligned Curriculum | Teacher turnover due to district dragging feet | Robust assessment/ data system | Distance Learning | COVID |
| Micro Challenge | | | | Meso Challenge | | Macro Challenge | |

*Note.* These are verbatim notes written by leaders and not edited for correct grammar.

*Figure 1.* Assets and challenges of adopting alternative curricula.

stated that his school had become a "showcase" school for the district, where district administrators steered support.

LE participants identified three meso-level or organizational challenges. The vice principal became noticeably emotional as she discussed balancing the budget by laying off teachers in Spring 2020. The LE team understood the need for the layoffs but was angry at the slow pace of rehiring, while the district human resources department spent two months shuffling teachers to sort out seniority issues. All teachers with three or fewer years of seniority were laid off, which affected some schools more than others. These teachers then found other jobs, leaving the positions unfilled and leading to the hiring of first-year teachers. The team identified the work of onboarding new teachers as a challenge.

LE participants discussed the district's adoption of a poorly aligned curriculum as another challenge. The team saw another challenge in the lack of a robust district assessment or data system that worsened during distance learning because district administrators decided to drop existing assessment systems and communicated these changes poorly. The team also indicated the poorly aligned curriculum as an asset, creating space for engaging with alternative curricula.

**Micro-Level Assets & Challenges**

Three micro-level or school challenges emerged that participants felt hampered in building coherence and trust within the school site. One was parents not being invested in curriculum or instruction. The team articulated another challenge with attendance issues, with roughly one-third of students not showing up and one-third not turning on their cameras. The group acknowledged a third challenge in that the present and engaged students were excited and had an overall highly positive learning experience, but this further entrenched gaps in outcomes due to attendance and engagement issues.

The LE team recognized 10 micro-level assets, reflecting their overall positive view of their work. The leadership team saw committed staff and strong leadership teams as assets supported by consistent leadership as an asset, with relatively low leadership turnover. During this time, teacher turnover slowed to rates far lower than the school had previously experienced and, according to the principal, was below the overall district percentage. The LE reflected on team continuity being a factor in high levels of trust within the leadership team and the school. Another asset was that recent summative scores improved, making teachers more likely to be on board with leadership goals.

LE participants revealed teacher retention as the key to building coherence and trust. At one point in the meeting, A. Jones stated emphatically: "They know the work is hard. They are willing to do the hard work. So, when the teachers come back for their third year, they are ready to dig in, and I don't have to go through a year holding their hands and helping them come to grips with the difficulty of the work." The second positive outcome of teacher retention is that they had better classroom management and instructional moves. The LE team diagnosed that these improved practices led to fewer behavioral issues and increased academic achievement, which engendered higher trust levels between teachers and students. Additionally, students and the community began to view themselves as community members and were more likely to buy into what the teacher asked.

## Significance

In discussing the significance of the Focus Of Practice (FOP) of this project, I considered context, practice, research, policy, and the connection to equity. The FOP of this study is how school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust. The FOP stemmed from a meeting that showed how central office support could affect coherence, trust, and

innovation. The schools' leadership teams in the curricular flexibility meeting leveraged a deep

contextual understanding of their community's needs to choose curriculum and practices that

they believed would drive student academic improvement. The curricular flexibility meeting is

emblematic of how districts make decisions that hamper school innovation.

In the following subsections, I discuss different aspects of the significance of this study.

First, I outline the significance of the location of the study. Then I explore the significance of this

study on educational practices. I briefly review how this study represents novel research before

looking at connections to equity.

**Context**

For this study, I worked with three schools in one Northern California school district.

Each of the schools was in the process of implementing Illustrative Mathematics (IM) as an

alternative to the district-adopted curriculum. Although the study is not focused on any particular

curriculum, I chose sites implementing IM to give us a common focus of discussion. I believe

this led to fewer variables in the data. I invited each school's principal, vice principal, and

instructional coach to participate in the study. The central office administrator team included the

district math coach, a central office coordinator, and me, the director of curriculum, instruction,

and assessment.

**Practice**

I designed this study to engage in practices that increase trust and coherence between and

among the central office and site administrators. By thoughtfully developing activities through

cycles of inquiry, I achieved this goal. I validate my initial assertion that these are vital

leadership considerations by increasing trust and coherence. Through data analysis, I could zero

in on six Critical Levers for increasing trust and coherence in educational organizations. Leaders

can increase trust by attending to building Proximity, Support, and Vulnerability. Leaders can increase organizational coherence by attending to Vision, Alignment, and Systems.

**Research**

I started with the idea that trust is foundational in creating conditions that foster innovation in districts and schools. Current research shares that greater levels of trust can lead to educators' willingness to show the vulnerability necessary to enact school change (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen Moran & Gareis, 2015). By analyzing the data from activities that I carefully constructed to build trust, I isolated three Critical Levers for increasing trust: Proximity, Support, and Vulnerability. For this study, I use the descriptors build and increase interchangeably.

Part of the rationale for my study design was to help me understand my new position as a central office director. Research states that organizational coherence is vital in building strong districts and schools (Honig, 2006; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012). Understanding how to best build support systems is necessary to understand the roles of central office and site administrator and the relationship between the two (Leithwood et al., 1995). Research led me to study how central office leaders build coherence between and among the central office and site administrators, which led to three Critical Levers for increasing coherence: Vision, Alignment, and Systems.

**Policy**

District leaders often craft policies to increase control and compliance. The traditional approach for curriculum adoption is that there needs to be one curriculum that is prescriptive enough to mitigate the high number of inexperienced teachers in an urban district. I explicitly wish to change this specific policy. However, the policy significance of this study extends

beyond the scope of adoptions. The six Critical Levers can support leaders in designing policies that attend to the foundational conditions of trust and coherence.

Viewing the policies as outcomes that benefit from the considerations of increasing trust and coherence is one positive outcome of this study. Another is the practices that leaders can use to increase trust and coherence in their work. Research and the findings in this study show that change requires leaders to engage in vulnerable work (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen Moran & Gareis, 2015). Changing policy is hard work. Leaders often use policy as a tool for compliance. Leaders can also carefully craft policy to improve equitable practices for educators and student outcomes. By attending to the six Critical Levers for increasing coherence and trust, which are the key findings of this study, leaders can bring educators together to create and implement policies that support educators and students alike.

## Connection to Equity

Historically, leaders in the focal schools chose curricula to mitigate the perceived deficit of high poverty, high numbers of students of color, and high teacher turnover in schools such as the schools that made up this PAR project's scope. We co-created asset-based support systems between and among site leaders and central office administrators. By focusing our work on increasing local action space in adopting and implementing an alternative curriculum, we were able to unravel how coherence and trust are built between and among school leaders, which can disrupt the traditional hierarchical district systems that perpetuate inequitable outcomes in our schools. To move the needle on creating more equitable outcomes, all levels of the organization need to be focused on modeling structures and conversations and centering the principal as an

instructional leader focused on equity (Grubb, 2010; Rigby & Tredway, 2015; Woulfin & Weiner, 2019).

Paolo Freire (2000) asked, "Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society?" (p. 45) Freire's exploration of education's liberating possibilities is a good framing for focusing on the local context. Freire (2000) discussed how society continues to normalize its systems back to those of domination, which is mirrored by organizations. The norming influence of the institution creates a gravity that pulls toward the status quo (Weiss, 1995).

Historically, the dominant culture defines black and brown societies, communities, and spaces, forcing the oppressed populace to fit into this fabricated definition (Kendi, 2016; Mills, 1987). The perception of failure and deficit in many urban schools reflects this domination through definition. School leaders use quantitative summative data to judge schools as failing and then attempt to help but exacerbate existing issues with practices such as remediation. Leaders in this Northern California school district traditionally see high levels of teacher turnover and low scores as an indication of a need for tighter controls and scripted curricula to mitigate the inherent failure of urban schools. This research project springs from the idea that entering into dialogue with the community and those most closely immersed in the work is a more effective way to engage in school improvement (Freire, 2000; Guajardo et al., 2016).

In the next section, I explore the design of this project, including further explanation of the purpose statement and sub-questions and the theory of action guiding the focus of practice. In addition, I outline the proposed activities that support the work and learning of study participants.

**Participatory Action Research Design**

I designed this project using Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodologies. Participatory action research involves participants and researchers acting together to understand an issue better and improve practice and outcomes. PAR was born from the work of Paolo Freire (2000) and can be both liberating and challenging. Freire rejected the traditional research model with its dualisms of subject/object and research/teaching as dehumanizing and counseled that liberation comes from the researcher participating in the research (Freire, 2000; Herr & Anderson, 2014). In addition, PAR centers on two-way communication, which is key to changing the self-correcting nature of organizations (Argyris, 2002; Herr & Anderson, 2014).

Participatory Action Research (PAR) transcends knowledge acquisition to the growth and empowerment of organizations and the community (Herr & Anderson, 2014). In this PAR project, school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust between and among each other and foster innovation. Acting on this collaboratively generated issue iteratively with cycles of inquiry balances action and reflection.  In traditional research, the researchers separate themselves from the research context. This separation is broken down through the PAR process with reciprocal information and learning, thus democratizing knowledge creation. I use the iterative cycles of Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) found in the improvement sciences as the structure for this project.

**Purpose Statement & Research Questions**

This project aimed to build coherence and trust between and among school leaders and central office administrators. This purpose leads to the overarching question and sub-questions of the research study:

- How do school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust between and among each other and foster innovation?

Four sub-questions guide my Participatory Action Research (PAR) cycles:

- How do school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust?

- How do school leaders and central office administrators improve the conditions necessary to foster innovation?

- How does coherence and trust between and among school leaders and central office administrators foster innovation?

- How does conducting this study contribute to my leadership development as a central office administrator?

**Project Activities**

This Participatory Action Research (PAR) project consisted of three successive cycles of inquiry from Fall 2021 to Fall 2022. The three cycles were the Pre-Cycle, Cycle One, and Cycle Two, each comprising at least one Learning Exchange and other activities (see Table 1). I co-created the activities for this project with the Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) group. I explore the activities more fully in Chapter 3.

I designed this study with the CPR group to build coherence and trust by bringing together site leaders (principals, vice principals, and instructional coaches) and central office administrators. The CPR worked together in Learning Exchanges to map existing protocols and create coherent systems for adopting, implementing, and judging the efficacy of alternative curricula. By designing activities to bring together these educational leaders, I gained insight into how central office administrators and site leaders build trust and coherence by surfacing six

Table 1

*Research Cycles*

| Research Cycle | Timeframe | Activities |
| --- | --- | --- |
| PAR Pre-Cycle & Context | Fall 2021 | CPR group mapping and planning<br>LE<br>Reflective Memos |
| PAR Cycle One | Spring 2021 | LE<br>1:1 Interviews<br>Reflective Memos |
| PAR Cycle Two | Fall 2022 | Personal Narrative<br>LE<br>Reflective Memos |

Critical Levers for increasing trust and coherence. For this study, I use the descriptors build and increase interchangeably.

## Confidentiality, Ethical Considerations, & Limitations

The participants in this study were central office administrators and site leaders. I protect them, their schools, and the district by using pseudonyms. Upon approval, I met with each prospective participant to clearly articulate the project's scope, how I would protect their privacy, and their option to withdraw at any point. I was cautious in my wording to factor in my position in the district hierarchy and the possible influence of my role. Throughout this study, I carefully analyzed data from different sources and member-checked with participants to ensure validity. I believe I was able to describe findings in such a way as to convey an element of shared experience with solid descriptions of the setting and many perspectives that add to the validity of the results. I explore these considerations more fully in Chapter 3.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I narrated how districts can act to build trust and coherence. I outlined the Focus of Practice (FOP) of this Participatory Action Research (PAR) project to build coherence and trust between and among central office administrators and school leaders. The Co-Practitioner Researchers (CPR) group built coherence and trust through two PAR cycles of inquiry and fostered innovation. By collecting and analyzing the data within each of these cycles, participants uncovered three Critical Levers that increase coherence: Vision, Alignment, and Systems. We also revealed three Critical Levers that increase trust: Proximity, Vulnerability, and Support.

I conducted the activities, data collection, analysis, and findings in the seven chapters that comprise this dissertation. In Chapter 2, I review the literature that applies to this project's scope,

including two main literature strands: Coherent Leadership Practices and Equity-Centered

Instructional Practices. In Chapter 3, I explain the Participatory Action Research (PAR)

methodology and how the Co-Practitioner Researchers (CPR) group was formed and worked on

the focus of practice. In Chapter 4, I cover the PAR Pre-Cycle and the context of this project. I

describe PAR Cycle One and Two in Chapters 5 and 6. I complete the dissertation in Chapter 7

by summarizing the project and synthesizing the findings and broader applications.

**CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The narrative of failing schools has been a powerful force impacting how Americans view this country's public schools throughout history (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). This conversation became a more centralized focal point with the 1983 release of the *Nation at Risk* government assessment of public education (*A nation accountable: Twenty-five years after a nation at risk*, 2008). Since this assessment, schools have been under increasing scrutiny, first from the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and, more recently, from the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (Bryk et al., 2015; Daly et al., 2015; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2007). This project is rooted in the idea that public school systems often begin with a negative framework that they attempt to improve by tightening accountability measures (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2007) and system-wide control of curriculum adoptions (Boaler, 2016). These sweeping one-size-fits-all reactions can hamper the change efforts needed at the local level of education (Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012; Weiss, 1995). Mandating stricter accountability measures is an easy lever to pull when creating change in complex systems like education. Unfortunately, the overall complexity of school systems often gets in the way of actual improvement.

Furthermore, the planning and execution of large-scale change is complex, resisting precise prediction (Scott, 2020). A plethora of research suggests innovative ways to address educational improvement. For example, Bryk et al. (2015) and Militello et al. (2009) point to implementing inquiry cycles to capture innovative improvement actions. They suggest starting small, failing, learning, and then iterating with adjustments. They also contend that instructional improvement efforts should not operate in isolation. Instead, Bryk et al. (2015) and Militello et al. (2009) advise implementing collaborative inquiry-action cycles with small teams of people

closest to the work. These efforts have proven to be the basis of lasting educational improvement.

This project sits squarely in the tension between the constraining efforts of high-stake accountability measures and the positive influence possible by increasing innovative actions for school improvement. Therefore, the literature review focuses on research into coherent leadership. I focus on four areas of coherent leadership in this literature review: organizational coherence and change, the role of the central office administrator, distributive leadership, and trust (see Figure 2).

## Coherent Leadership

There is a long history of unequal school support leading to inequitable outcomes. Schools have historically achieved what they set out to achieve, sorting the populace and recreating and supporting more extensive societal systems (Grubb, 2010; Kozol, 1991; Theoharis, 2007). Coherent Leadership is key to engaging this history and enacting school change that breaks the status quo and creates more just outcomes for all. Research is clear that both site and district-level leadership are essential in planning and implementing lasting school improvement (Honig et al., 2010; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012; Park & Datnow, 2009; Rigby & Tredway, 2015; Spillane, 1988; Spillane et al., 2004). These leaders must make equity the foundation of school improvement efforts (Khalifa, 2018; Kozol, 1991; Rigby & Tredway, 2015; Theoharis, 2007). In addition, leaders must be transparent and explicit about their goals when communicating with staff and the community and keep the core commitment to equity central, or the traditional oppressive structures and practices will remain in place (Khalifa, 2018; Rigby & Tredway, 2015). As central office administration conceives and fills roles both centrally and at sites, it must challenge the status quo and push against the oppression that has plagued our

*Figure 2*. Focus of practice and literature bins.

schools for so long (Khalifa, 2018). Khalifa (2018) asserts that to achieve equity in education, the current leaders must develop others who can transform our institutions by eliminating inequitable practices so that student success and failure are no longer predictable. This assertion by Khalifa is echoed by the framework on developing equity-centered leaders developed by the National Equity Project, as captured in Figure 3 (National Equity Project, n.d.). Leading for equity means building systems where school leaders at every level consciously choose to move away from the status quo, which is a tacit choice to continue replicating an unjust society (Eubanks et al., 1997; Freire, 2000; Khalifa, 2018; Kozol, 1991; Neri et al., 2019; Weiss, 1995).

## Organizational Coherence & Change

Leaders must understand their organization to build coherent lasting change. Organization building responds to people wanting to rationalize the nature of the physical and social worlds. Researchers map organizations' structures and operations to better understand how to change institutional outcomes (Bolman & Deal, 2009). Many structures and operations are built to respond to an issue and come about naturally; others are built rationally with a specific outcome in mind. This layering of the rationale and natural responses makes organizations more complex over time (Bolman & Deal, 2009).

In addition to the difficulties of the amalgam of naturally and rationally built systems, educational organizations are made more complex by their loose coupling. Weick (1976) countered the prevailing theory of the time that organizations were densely and tightly bound together with the idea of loosely coupled systems. Loose coupling describes an organization through the complexity of the culture of each local context. Each school community in a district has its own culture and understands the change implementation through this culture. What results can often be frustrating, as a meticulously planned change effort is not implemented consistently

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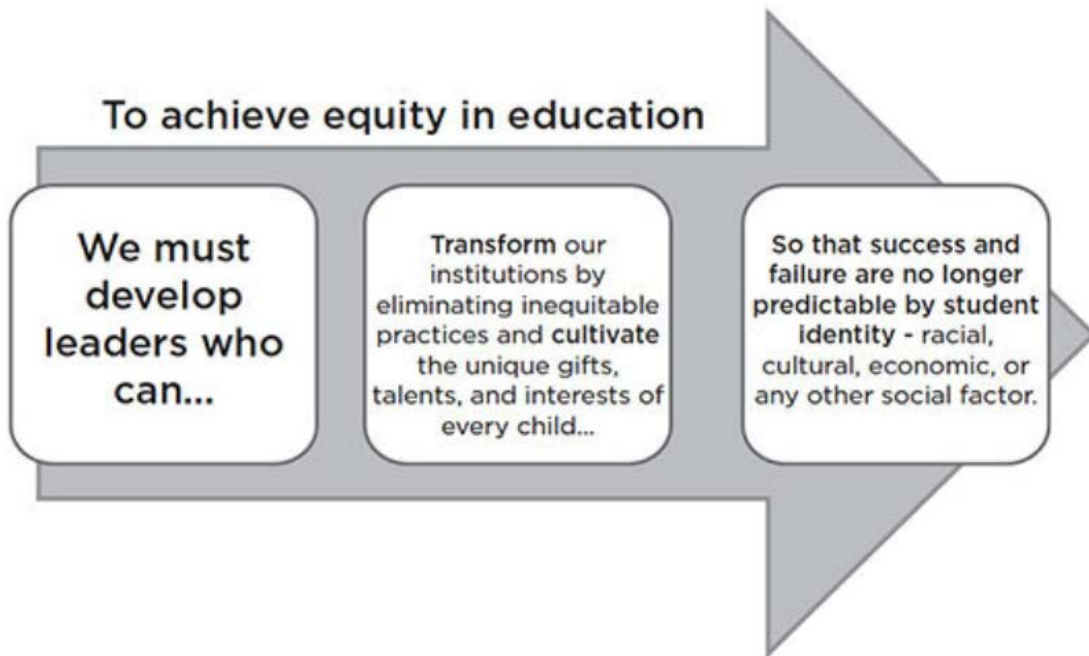
*Figure 3.* National Equity Project: Equity in education.

due to each school understanding the change differently (Weick, 1996). Loose coupling is neutral but can be felt as a negative when it thwarts change efforts. Alternatively, it can be a positive when it buffers against a less well-thought-out, hierarchically driven change.

Loose coupling accounts for some institutional barriers, but research concludes that organizations normalize toward the status quo. Argyris (2002) argued that there is institutional inertia away from change. He advanced that every level of an organization engages in defensive thinking that creates circular self-reinforcing strategies of bypass that reinforce theories already in use. Weiss (1995) proposed that the institution's norming effect must be studied and understood as a stand-alone force within an organization. In addition, she found that teachers prefer the status quo. Wong et al. (2020) similarly found that the institution acts as a drag on change implementation in schools. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) found that isomorphism is a constraining process that causes one unit to resemble another. They found three types of these processes: normative, coercive, and mimetic. An example of the normative effect is how teacher training programs use the same methods and, by doing so, normalize teachers into similar practices. Coercive refers to explicit rules or prohibitions within an organization. Mimetic refers to the impact of teachers adopting practices of other teachers, which then brings them into some form of alignment. These forces conform schools and districts to what is already understood and accepted.

Research also provides promising practices that may counter these barriers. Argyris (2002) proposes double-loop learning. Double-loop learning refers to stepping away from the problem at hand and creating a reflective space to consider how to best work on the task so far and shift systems. Similarly, Weiss (1995) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that to overcome the drag of the institution, leaders must explicitly plan to combat the inherent drag on

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change efforts. Wong et al. (2020) acknowledge the institutional drag and advance central office leadership as a source of agency when they empower site leaders to embrace the change.

Understanding the complex nature of the institutions and organizations that make up public education is critical. Bolman and Deal (2009) explore how attempts to improve the system have made it more complex. Although there are differences in the work of these authors, they agree that leaders must purposefully plan to counteract the institutional norming toward the status quo. Many change efforts are an attempt to fix a perceived issue. Sometimes, leaders rationally design change efforts for a specific outcome. The layering of these efforts over time leads to more complexity and formality. Leaders must consider the effects of this layering to implement change effectively. If the change effort is too tight, it will be restrictive, and if too loose, it may lead to dissonance. Creating a coherent change effort means mapping the nature of the organization and planning a balanced approach suited to the local context.

Ample empirical research points to the importance of planning specifically to counter institutional norming. The research of Honig et al. (2010) found that improving teaching and learning district-wide is a systems problem needing the participation of both central and site administration. Weiss (1995) proposed the institution as a stand-alone consideration and recommended that leaders must plan accordingly. The research of Rigby and Tredway (2015) indicated that leaders need to be clear about how they see equity and use it as a frame for their work. The research of Woulfin and Weiner (2019) centered on the principal as a critical lever for nurturing positive, encouraging relationships to foster lasting change.

### Role of Site-Based & Central Office Administrators

As director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, I oversee how central office administrators define their work. I am focusing this project on adopting an alternative math

curriculum. Still, learning how central office administrators and site-based leaders interact with planning and implementing equitable changes in schools is much broader than any specific curriculum. This section explores the research on central office administration and principal leadership and how building systems of support collaboratively can lead to more equitable outcomes. This section begins with the importance of principals as crucial figures in improving school outcomes. Then I explore the importance of central office influence on improving the capacity of principals. Lastly, I discuss the positive nature of collaborative ties between the central office before moving on to the next section, where I discuss the nature of distributive leadership.

Central office administrators play a vital role in implementing system-wide changes in schools. Although central office administrators can serve as a conduit for change, they are often overlooked as primary change agents (Honig et al., 2010; Honig & Venkateswaran 2012). Traditionally, central office leadership is not a significant facet of school improvement initiatives. Instead, schools approach improvement initiatives on a school-by-school basis, leading to jagged, uneven improvement across a district or over time (Mania-Singer, 2017).

Principals are critical figures in changing student outcomes in schools. Hallinger and Heck (1998) reviewed research from 1980–1995, which explored the relationship between principal leadership and student achievement. The findings they drew from this review supported the belief that principals exercise a measurable, indirect effect on school effectiveness and student achievement and are supported by subsequent empirical research (Leithwood et al., 1995; Supovitz et al., 2010). Supovitz et al. (2010) used teacher survey data and student achievement data from a midsized urban school district to examine the structural relationships within student learning. They theorized dimensions of principal leadership, teacher peer influence, and change

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in teacher instructional practice. In addition, they found that although teachers directly influenced classrooms and were often strongly influenced by peer relationships, principals had the most substantial influence on student outcomes because they could set a vision and agenda for all of the teachers (Supovitz et al., 2010). This centering of the principal effect highlights the need for principals to lead equitable instruction. Rigby and Tredway's (2015) research indicates that principals often do not clearly understand what equitable instructional leadership means or entails. Strong central office leadership can mitigate this lack of understanding (Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012).

While teachers are direct agents of change and principals may have the most influence, research indicated that central office administrators play a vital role in building their capacity for the work (Burch, 2007; Honig et al., 2010; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012; Schmoker, 2019; Thessin & Louis, 2019). Honig and Venkateswaran (2012) analyzed data from interviews, observations, and documents to identify that efficacious central office administrators model and teach principals instructional leadership skills and strategies. Central office administrators push change by focusing on limited reform options, leading to better school decision-making. While principals and teachers serve as the primary agents driving professional development, they often rely on central office administrators to build their capacity for the work (Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012). Central office administrators can act to limit the unending pursuit of new initiatives to focus on the highest-level strategies and structures (Schmoker, 2019). Burch (2007) found that alignment between central office administration and site leadership on which aspects of instructional leadership are essential leads to more effective change strategies substantiated by student outcomes.

Using observation, interview, and document review data from three districts undergoing what they termed "central office transformation" in 2007–08, Honig et al. (2010) concluded that close collaborative ties between the central office and school sites could improve working conditions and student outcomes. On the one hand, because any organization has limited resources, the authors argue that the back and forth between decentralized control or systems that assert strong and coherent control from the central office create an unproductive dichotomy throughout the system. On the other hand, the researchers claim that central office administrators who intentionally work with school principals to improve teaching and learning create a foundation for enhanced communication, leading to transparent decisions about allocating limited resources (Honig et al., 2010). Furthermore, this partnership with central office administrators who specifically orient the work toward developing high-quality teaching and expanding learning opportunities improves the likelihood of coherent change strategies (Honig et al., 2010). Administrators who lead the central office should invest in people leading this work throughout the central office and primarily focus on the collaborative ties between the central office and school leaders, leading to systemic and lasting improvement (Honig et al., 2010). It is most effective to intentionally and transparently orient central office support toward teaching and learning and the feedback loop between the central office administrator and the site leaders (Honig et al., 2010).

Thessin and Louis (2019) further explored the importance of the relationship between central office administrators and principals by gathering data from 12 principal supervisors over 16 months. Their study highlighted the importance of a learning-centered collaboration, focusing on the principals' instructional leadership and improved student outcomes. The study indicated that it is vital for central office administrators to bring their past experiences as successful

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principals to the forefront. Thus, they establish credibility by immediately engaging in joint learning and improving instruction and student outcomes with the principals to achieve a more robust and lasting change in principal practice. They also found that principals learned how to refine their skills, strategies, and dispositions as instructional leaders through collaboration. The improvement extended beyond principal practice when the partnership went beyond observation and feedback to include co-planning and facilitating student outcomes. It improved the capacity of the site-based team (Thessin & Louis, 2019). The authors further highlight three keys for district leaders: establishing relational trust between central office administrators and principals where there is a feeling of equal commitment to the work, avoiding reassignment and reorganization because coherence is essential to school change, and having central office administrators play a crucial role in achieving district goals and committing to systemic learning and leading. Focusing on areas of trust, coherence, and central office commitment to systemic learning can mitigate the danger of falling into the traps of hampering local innovation.

Central office administrators can often have a narrowed view of education that hinders their ability to lead school improvement effectively (Honig et al., 2010). Leaders in a healthy system nurture local innovation rather than controlling local improvement efforts with directive communication that hinders progress (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988). Another issue that can arise in central office support is the dual and sometimes competing goals of supporting and improving education and maintaining the stability and order of the system (Spillane, 1998), which can influence educators to return to the status quo (Weiss, 1995).

It is evident that both central office and school-level administrators are essential, but the relationship between these people seems most vital to the organization and student learning. Leadership is naturally distributed between formal and informal leadership positions in any

multilevel system; therefore, it is beneficial to explore these leadership structures (Spillane et al., 2004).

## Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership (DL) is a theoretical framework that can better understand how leadership operates in complex systems and can be used to optimally organize a school or district (Spillane, 2005). Rather than focus on the individual leader or the features of the situation, distributed leadership centers on how individuals engage in tasks that are "stretched" or distributed across the organization (Harris et al., 2007). While good schools are typically seen as synonymous with good leaders, defining cause and effect is difficult (Spillane et al., 2004). Weiss (1995) proposed that it may be beneficial to map the different resources that people bring to serve as a tool to institute lasting change. Leithwood et al. (1995) used interview data from 72 teachers and principals in six schools to consider variation in school structures. This study concluded that leadership is not an individual or personal endeavor but a collective phenomenon. A distributed leadership framework can help leaders understand systems and build the capacity to release an organization's human potential. Understanding leadership means moving beyond personal knowledge to what the team can know and do together (Harris et al., 2007; Spillane et al., 2004).

According to Spillane et al. (2004) and Spillane (2005), one person cannot do it all; therefore, leadership is inherently distributed among multiple people, whether named or not. Consequently, the research asserted that it is critical to intentionally plan and execute leadership structures on a distributed leadership framework. Doing so gives more significant opportunities to support and build the conditions for improved outcomes. This finding is supported by Leverett (2002), who indicates that due to the siloed nature of schools, it is

imperative to involve the collective commitment of the school and district administrators to shift practice. In addition to the different levels of formal leadership, one must expand the DL frame to include informal leaders acting on the situation (Spillane, 2005). System complexity can only be understood and regarded in designing school improvement plans by considering all these factors.

Districts and schools need to move beyond the traditional hierarchy with decision-making at the top and information flowing down into the schools and classrooms, influencing how people act and restraining innovation (Weiss, 1995). A leader can do this by creating alignment and coherence between leaders, particularly among people working in different positions within the leadership hierarchy, and focusing on collaborative decision-making practices that lead to greater ownership of decisions (Daly et al., 2015; Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Findings point to a greater need for balance within systems, providing leadership and systemic support yet also providing enough flexibility at the local level so that educators feel empowered and able to innovate (Honig et al., 2006; Honig et al., 2010; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012; Leithwood et al., 1995). School leaders should distribute leadership and build strong connections between leaders at different levels to combat the loss of institutional will and knowledge that results from leadership churn (Leverett, 2002).

Empirical research shows a positive correlation between distributed leadership (DL) and lasting school improvement (Bryk et al., 2015; Harris et al., 2007; Leverett, 2002; Park & Datnow, 2009; Spillane, 2005) and that central office administrators play a vital role in effectively implementing DL (Harris et al., 2007; Park & Datnow, 2009). By nature, a distributed leadership model is diffused, and central office administrators are vital to maximizing these structures and improving outcomes (Harris et al., 2007). As educational organizations move

toward a more distributed approach to leadership, they need to plan for a corresponding increase in complexity (Honig et al., 2010; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012; Park & Datnow, 2009; Spillane et al., 2004).

Central office administrators can support school improvement innovations by implementing networked improvement communities (NIC) (Bryk, 2010; Bryk et al., 2015; Shum, 2015). Bryk (2010) proposes the NIC as a collaborative model that counters how experimental science isolates studies from variation through faithful implementation of carefully selected characteristics. The researchers suggest that this focus on isolating variation is misguided when variation is the primary issue in educational improvement. A well-constructed and connected NIC is a mechanism that educators can use to understand the context of how the micro, meso, and macro levels of the educational system interact and affect school, district, and state-level innovation (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017; Militello et al., 2009; Safir, 2019; Shum, 2015). Moreover, since local context matters, a compelling central office administrator (meso level) must have efficient two-way communication with site leaders (micro level) to pool data and detect patterns. By interpreting these patterns, central office administrators can build effective interventions in collaboration with school leaders (Shum, 2015). The network improvement community has also surfaced in the work of Spillane et al. (2004) as a way to connect leadership vectors. The authors concluded that a group of efficiently marshaled experts could be greater than the sum of the parts. As leaders interact around school improvement tasks, task complexity, and ambiguity, they must consider whether they possess the knowledge necessary to complete these tasks. Trust is integral to building these networks, which I explore in the following section.

**Trust**

In Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) seminal work, supported by later research, they defined five attributes of trust which I detail in this paragraph (Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). The five facets of this virtue are benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. Benevolence is the assurance that the other will not exploit one's vulnerability. Trusting the benevolence of leadership leads educators to be more willing to expand their repertoire and try new things (Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Moreover, the basis of equitable school change is found in this expansion from a historically oppressive status quo (Eubanks et al., 1997; Freire, 2000; Khalifa, 2018; Kozol, 1991; Neri et al., 2019; Weiss, 1995). Reliability is the extent to which someone can attain expectations. Trusting a leader to be reliable can lead educators to higher levels of collaboration when they feel that the work is held equitably (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Competence is the ability to follow through on or the capacity to deliver promises. The power to achieve the improvement goal is a central factor in enrolling educators in a change effort. Educators are less likely to follow the change plan if they feel a leader is incompetent (Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Honesty is exhibited when events match prior expectations/promises and when future commitments are honored. If educators feel they cannot trust the word of a leader, they are likely to be more risk-averse, as they may distrust the leader's intention (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Finally, openness is the extent to

which information is shared. Educators are far more likely to follow leaders who they see as transparent because they understand the motivations, leading to higher levels of trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). These definitions frame the understanding of trust and how it can positively and negatively impact organizational effectiveness and growth. I use this framework when striving to understand relational trust among actors in this project and study.

Trust, or the lack thereof, exists between multiple levels of social interaction, including individuals, groups, or the greater system (Daly et al., 2015). This also includes a teacher's trust in their principal, colleagues, and community in a school. In a district, this extends to multiple levels of the central office. Often, educators at different levels experience trust differently due to greater feelings of vulnerability. Those who are lower in the leadership hierarchy tend to be hypervigilant in their trust assessments of those higher in the organizational chart (Daly et al., 2015; Gray & Summers, 2016), which is a factor in asking educators to show the vulnerability necessary to enact school change (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). In building a strong school culture, a leader must consider relationships among constituents.

The research of Bryk (2010) used data from a 15-year longitudinal study of Chicago schools to yield a comprehensive set of school practices and school and community conditions that promote school improvement. Bryk concluded that relational trust was fundamental to creating and sustaining lasting change in schools. Schools with higher levels of trust can typically have higher levels of collaboration (Daly et al., 2015; Gray & Summers, 2016; Tschannen-Moran, 2001), which I highlight in the distributed leadership subsection as central to school improvement. Relational trust fosters social exchanges that lead to professionals learning

from each other (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Higher levels of organizational trust correlate with higher levels of comfort and an increased willingness to invest energy in accomplishing organizational goals (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Honest conversations among educators can be vulnerable because there is a tacit admission of ignorance; therefore, educators are more willing to experiment with new practices when levels of trust are higher (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). In addition, there is a correlation between trust and innovation (Daly et al., 2015; Schwabsky et al., 2020).

Alternatively, research also indicates that lower levels of trust negatively influence the school and district levels (Bryk, 2010; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Daly et al., 2015; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Negative ties or feelings associated with a lack of trust constrain the quality of information necessary for successful change efforts (Daly et al., 2015). A lack of organizational trust has a deleterious effect on communication at all levels (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Daly et al., 2015; Schwabsky et al., 2020; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). A lack of trust among colleagues can lead to relatively minor issues becoming areas of conflict that hamper outcomes (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Organizations often respond to a lack of trust by implementing rules and regulations as a substitute. These regulations may work for relatively simple tasks, but more complex tasks benefit from collaboration enhanced by trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Daly et al., 2015; Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Moreover, the research of Daly et al. (2015) indicates that perceptions of trust, innovative climate, and efficacy are associated with the likelihood of forming negative relationships among leaders and that these negative relationships often outweigh the positive effects of successful actions. Returning to the five facets of trust, if one acts in a way that seems to run counter to an individual's best interest or from a place of dishonesty, trust between the two will decrease (Tschannen-Moran, 2001;

Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Any decrease in trust can lead to increases in conflict and reduce the organization's ability to drive improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

School is, by its very nature, a high-stakes endeavor. Families send their children to schools with high expectations and aspirations for the efficacy of public education. District leaders need to align around creating safe environments for risk-taking and subsequent failure involved in rejecting the status quo (Daly et al., 2015). Increasing trust is associated with improved student outcomes, and this increased efficacy builds trust. Therefore, focusing on increasing trust will build effectiveness, which will build trust, creating reflexive growth for each (Gray & Summers, 2016). This increase in trust also increases the space for respectful exchanges and genuine listening. It makes people feel valued, so that the inevitable disagreements have less chance of derailing the work (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

**Conclusion**

Increasing hierarchical control of schools is a way that central office administrators exert control over education in the name of coherence. This tighter accountability hampers trust, which research indicates is a crucial driver for innovation. Central office administrators often react to the perception of school failure with stricter control of areas such as curriculum, which is counterproductive (Daly et al., 2015; Grubb, 2010; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2007). Building trust and coherence can drive innovation to improve schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). The key authors cited in this chapter can be found in Table 2.

Strong leadership across multiple levels is key to innovating away from the status quo of inequitable educational outcomes. Throughout this literature review, the role of central office administrators and site-based leadership, a distributed frame to help understand decision-making, and trust emerged as integral factors in improving innovative practices (Honig et al., 2010;

Table 2

*How are coherence and trust built between and among school leaders and central office administrators?*

| Organizational Coherence & Change | Role of Site Administrator & Role of Central Office | Distributed Leadership | Trust |
|---|---|---|---|
| Argyris, 2002 | Honig et al., 2010 | Spillane, 2005 | Tschannen-Moran, 2001, 2009, & 2014 |
| Weiss, 1995 | Schmoker, 2019 | Harris et al., 2007 | |
| Wong et al., 2020 | Supovitz et al., 2010 | Leithwood et al., 1995 | Bryk & Schneider, 2002 |

Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012; Park & Datnow, 2009; Rigby & Tredway, 2015; Spillane, 1998; Spillane et al., 2004). This review lays the foundation for exploring how coherence and trust are built between and among school leaders and central office administrators.

# CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

In this Participatory Action Research (PAR) study, I examine how school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust and foster innovation. The design of this PAR is grounded in the Theory Of Action (TOA) that *if* coherence and trust are built between and among school leaders and central office administrators, *then* the required conditions to foster innovation will improve.

The context of the study is three schools within four miles of each other in two cities in Northern California, within one public school district. Each school implements Illustrative Mathematics (IM) as an alternative to the district-adopted curriculum. I invited the principal, vice principal, and instructional coach from the three schools to participate in the study. The other participants were three central office administrators: the facilitator of innovation, the district math coordinator, and the curriculum, instruction, and assessment director. I more fully outline the participants later in this chapter.

In this chapter, I present the details of the research design. I include the methodological approach to the study, an outline of the participatory action research cycles, and the process for choosing and working with participants. I then reiterate the research questions and give data collection and analysis details. I conclude with considerations for the study, including potential limitations.

## Qualitative Research Process

In this project, I collect and analyze data to gain insights into coherence, trust, and innovation in the three focal schools. The researcher takes a humanistic approach to understand the research questions in qualitative research. Qualitative methods center people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions and generate non-numerical data (Creswell &

Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2016). My focus is both among the leaders of the three schools and between the leaders of the three schools and central office administrators.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) illustrate that constructivists view individuals' subjective understanding as varied and multiple, where meaning is forged through interactions with other people. This constructivist approach fits my Focus of Practice (FOP) on how school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust. I decided on a qualitative research design to reflect a constructivist school improvement lens. Peer action research brings the researcher into the research, which helped me to uncover findings that answer my research questions. By analyzing this project's processes, activities, and events, I surfaced codes, categories, themes, and findings that led me to the Critical Levers to improve coherence and trust.

### Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a research methodology that intentionally includes the people and groups most affected by the research questions in the design and execution of the process. PAR reflects the cultures, priorities, and concerns of those being studied. In PAR, the lead researcher and Co-Practitioner Researchers (CPR) co-select a common topic of interest. Then, the researcher engages the community in finding answers and applying them to the point of concern (Hunter et al., 2013). I used PAR design with the CPR group to reflect that authentic research is not done on a community but with the community (Freire, 2000; Hunter et al., 2013).

For this PAR study, I used the four essential characteristics described by Herr and Anderson (2014) to concretize the conceptual PAR framework further: developing a plan of action, implementing the plan, observing the effects of the action, and then reflecting or analyzing those actions to plan new action steps. I more fully outline the cycles of inquiry in

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discussing the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles in the improvement sciences subsection (see Figure 4).

PAR developed largely from the work of Paolo Freire, who was suspicious of researchers arriving in communities with more answers than questions (Freire, 2000). In PAR studies, the researcher takes a deliberate, collaborative stance and must understand and explicate their positionality in the project (Herr & Anderson, 2014). In PAR, research and practice are intimately linked and consistently inform each other, which helped me consider how central office administrators and school leaders build coherence and trust. In addition to PAR methodologies, learning from the improvement science is central to my thinking about my study design.

**Improvement Science**

Over the past half-century, improvement science principles have led to improvements in various industries, from health care to educational organizations. The core lesson from improvement science is that organizational inefficiencies do not stem from an absence of research or an inferior workforce. Instead, outcomes are the results of systems design. In this way, improvement science addresses these systemic issues by focusing on specific tasks, their tools, and how the existing policies, structures, and norms affect outcomes (Bryk et al., 2015).

One primary method of inquiry in improvement science is the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle. This framework allows for rapid learning cycles using systemic experimentation applied to everyday practice. As illustrated in Figure 4, the PDSA cycle consists of four steps repeated to answer questions. The PDSA cycle begins with a working theory of improvement that gathers data to test the theory. When a researcher compares predictions to the data, they can reveal gaps in understanding. Typically, there will be more wrong predictions than right, and
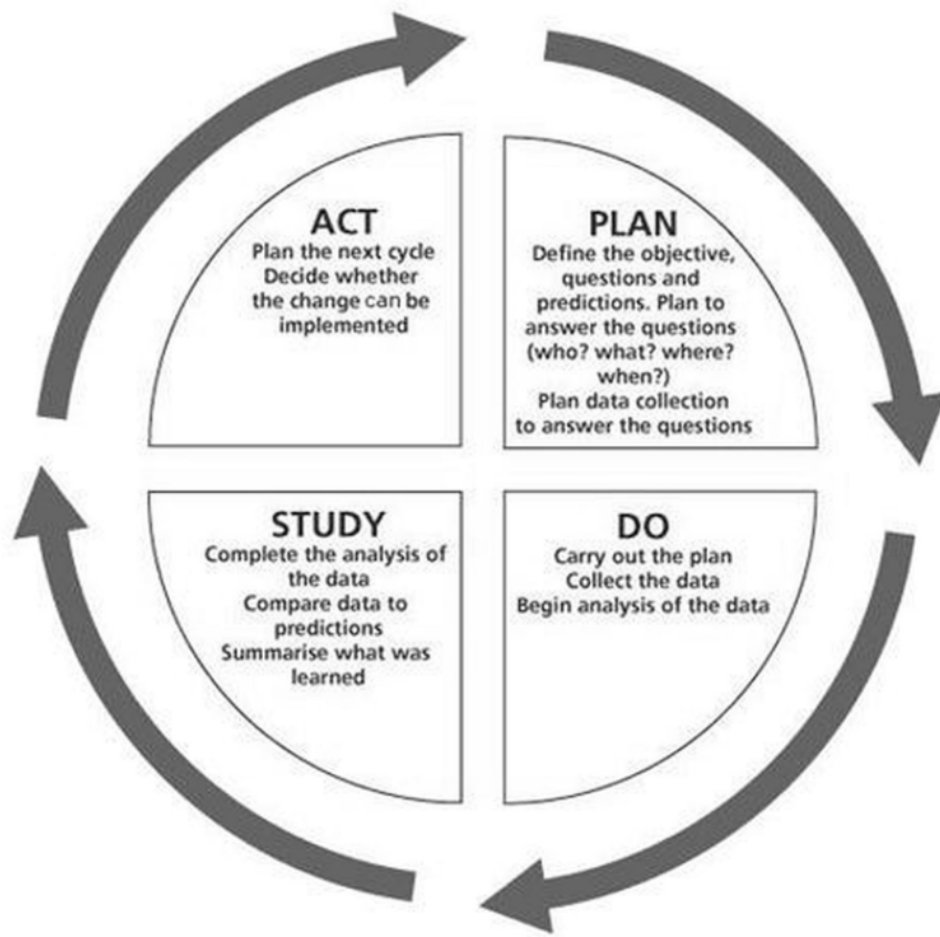
*Figure 4.* PDSA cycle.

from this initial failure can come great learning (Bryk et al., 2015). For this project, I used the PDSA framing to build cycles of inquiry that moved me closer to answering the research question: How do school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust between and among each other and foster innovation?

**Community Learning Exchange**

Guajardo et al. (2016) developed the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) framework to support diverse community members coming together for a period of engaged, deep collaborative learning. During a CLE, a group of people examine their everyday challenges and collective gifts and then freely share ideas for improvement that can change the system and each individual (Guajardo et al., 2016). The authors are influenced by Freire's (2000) work, which asserts that people need to do more than come together in dialogue; they must act and critically reflect on their reality and transform it through further action and critical reflection. Guajardo et al. (2016) propose five axioms to further our understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of the CLE process. My learning exchanges stem from the CLE methodologies but are on a smaller scale, so I chose to call them Learning Exchanges (LE) instead. I use the CLE axioms as a design framework for the LEs within my PAR project. The five axioms are below, along with how I intend to implement them.

Axiom 1: Learning and leadership are dynamic social processes. The beginning point of work in schools is the social nature of the work. Relationship building is key to learning. I built this project with relational trust woven throughout every interaction. Individual and group connections are crucial to enacting meaningful school change. The LE also provides an opportunity to build trust, which is at the heart of this study.

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Axiom 2: Conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes. By inviting participants into the gracious space and building the conditions to support learning in public, we gained traction to achieve the proximate goals of the individual LEs. In addition, the structure of the LE models these axioms for further use within the school and district work.

Axiom 3: The people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns. Axiom 3 is foundational for this research project. A central theory of this project is that empowering people's local perspectives and wisdom to help shape district policy benefits both the school and the district. Central office administrators can best support schools by fostering space that builds coherence and trust through codesigning systems.

Axiom 4: Crossing boundaries enriches the development and educational processes. A cross-boundary group of educators is being brought together in the LEs. The co-practitioner researcher group for this study includes three central office administrators and site leaders from three schools, offering diverse perspectives that enrich our learning.

Axiom 5: Hope and change are built on the assets and dreams of locals and their communities. Both central office and site leaders benefit from leading the work through the lens of asset-based understanding of the individuals and organizations. We designed the LEs to honor participants' local context and needs, bringing rich data for analysis. By including participants' stories in the design of the LEs, the group coalesced around shared and divergent experiences and learning.

**PAR Cycles**

The Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle is a primary method of inquiry in improvement research (Bryk et al., 2015). Another related method is the collaborative inquiry framework (CIF) proposed by Militello et al. (2009). These frameworks (see Table 3) are recursive inquiry-

Table 3

*Peer Action Research (PAR) Cycles*

| Research Cycle | Timeframe | Activities |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Planning Pre-Cycle | Fall 2020 | Meet the Team<br>Scope and Sequence<br>Design and Equity Focus<br>Learning Exchange to Surface<br>Assets and Challenges<br>Reflective Memos |
| PAR Pre-Cycle | Fall 2021 | Learning Exchange to Map<br>Existing Relationship Between<br>Curriculum, Instruction, and<br>Assessment<br>1:1 Interviews<br>Reflective Memos |
| PAR Cycle One | Spring 2022 | Learning Exchange to Map<br>Current Systems of Curricular<br>Autonomy and Building District<br>Template<br>Learning Exchange to Build<br>System for Judging the Efficacy<br>of Alternative Curriculum<br>1:1 Interviews<br>Reflective Memos |
| PAR Cycle Two | Fall 2022 | Learning Exchange to Member<br>Check Emerging Findings<br>Personal Narrative on Building<br>Trust<br>Reflective Memos |

action cycles, with inquiry embedded in each activity. The goal for each cycle is to engage co-practitioner researchers in the improvement science process of PDSA. These PDSA cycles allow for trial and error and encourage discovering new solutions, which is the opposite of the more common layering process (Christmas Tree approach) of adding more school programs and expectations. The inquiry action cycle removes what does not work, modifying and strengthening the practices that improve student learning (Militello et al., 2009). Each of these methodologies centers on collaborative iteration as a critical driver to lasting change in schools.

I use the PDSA acronym and framework, but the work is also profoundly informed by the CIF. The Collaborative Inquiry Framework focuses on each participant as an expert in their particular area and through their lived experience. The collective framing, implementing, examining, and iterating align with PDSA, which Bryk et al. (2015) argue leads to faster learning. In addition, the *collective* framing brings different voices into the conversation, leading to actual change in what people do, not just what they state (Militello et al., 2009).

**Research Questions**

Research questions are central to conceiving and designing a research project. The hampering of innovation I experienced during the curricular flexibility meeting led me to focus this study on coherence and trust. I refined the questions around the micro, meso, and macro levels of organizational need to the core research question. The main question is: How do school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust between and among each other and foster innovation? I capture the research question and sub-questions for this project in Table 4.

Table 4

*Research Questions & Sub-Questions*

| Research Question | Sub-Questions |
|---|---|
| How do school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust between and among each other and foster innovation? | How do school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust? |
| | How do school leaders and central office administrators improve the conditions necessary to foster innovation? |
| | How does coherence and trust between and among school leaders and central office administrators foster innovation? |
| | How does conducting this study contribute to my leadership development as a central office administrator? |

## Participants, Data Collection, & Analysis

In the following section, I explore the context of this project. I discuss the schools included in the project's scope and the leaders who made up the CPR group. I also outline the data collection and analysis methods and the possible study limitations inherent in my design.

### Co-Practitioner Researchers Group

The Co-Practitioner Researchers (CPR) group included site leaders from three schools and three central office administrators. I invited the principal, vice principal, and instructional coach from the three schools to participate as CPR members. I am the lead researcher and one of the three central office administrators participating. I more fully outline who participated in the project in Chapter 4. The CPR group met for at least one Learning Exchange (LE) each cycle. In addition, there were other activities, such as 1:1 interviews and reflective memoing.

### Other Participants

The CPR group comprised the core participants in this study. I used the Personal Narrative as an opening activity in meetings that included other district members beyond the CPR group and gathered data from some of these activities. In addition, I used data from other district employees in my Reflective Memos if the conversation thread furthered my understanding of the core considerations of this study.

### Data Collection & Analysis

Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe the process of making sense of collected data as "peeling back the layers of an onion" (p. 190). Researchers utilize sequential steps to move from the general understanding of the data to the more specific (Saldaña, 2016). I collected data from Learning Exchanges, 1:1 Interviews, and Reflective Memos. I organized the data by importing it into a locked folder in Google Suite. The data included artifacts from LEs, transcripts from LEs,

transcripts from 1:1 Interviews, Reflective Memos, and Field Notes. Next, I read and examined

all the data to provide a general overview that included expressed ideas and an initial impression

of the depth and validity of the data. I highlighted words and phrases and recorded general

thoughts in a column to the right of the text of the transcript. Then, I read through again,

highlighting in a different color and capturing words and phrases in another column on the right.

I used the participant's own words whenever appropriate.

By analyzing the individual data points, I captured patterns in the data, made charts with

frequency, and noted points of resonance. I used the codes to generate categories and collapsed

individual codes into more significant ideas. From these categories, I created themes and six key

levers influencing the broad themes of Coherence and Trust. Lastly, I synthesized these themes

and levers into a narrative storyline and models of the findings.

Saldaña (2016) describes codes as researcher-generated constructs that symbolize

qualitative data and attribute interpreted meaning to individual data for further analysis.

Traditional qualitative studies use open coding, which does not have predetermined codes,

allowing the codes to emerge from the coding process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña,

2016). Saldaña (2016) states that there is validity in using a mix of pre-established codes and the

open coding method. It is essential to acknowledge pre-existing theories and research that may

drive the study (Saldaña, 2016). In the case of this PAR, I focus on how site leaders and central

office administrators build coherence and trust. Therefore, I researched trust and used some

predetermined codes derived from the work of Tschannen-Moran (Tschannen-Moran, 2001;

Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015) to inform

my understanding of trust throughout the process.

During the first data analysis cycle, I preferred to use in vivo coding, when appropriate, so that it was the participants' actual words. Sometimes, the data did not lend itself to in vivo, so I would use descriptive coding to capture the essence of the data. Many codes lent themselves to different interpretations or areas of consideration, so I engaged in simultaneous coding. Simultaneous coding was essential when the categories were unclear at the beginning of the coding cycles. As I passed over the data again, the codes often led to a more significant concept, and I began to name the codes as these possible concepts. By focusing on the ideas, I could see patterns that allowed me to collapse the codes into categories that would eventually lead to themes and the six levers. I discuss the specific coding process in Chapters 4 and 5. The research questions and data sources are in Table 5.

### *Learning Exchanges*

Community Learning Exchange pedagogies are essential to this study's design of PAR cycles. I use the term Learning Exchange (LE) to denote the smaller size of these meetings. All LEs were virtual on Google Meet or Zoom with the transcript add-on enabled. I collaboratively designed the topics and frames of each LE with the Co-Practitioner Researchers (CPR) group. I then planned any further specific activities needed before facilitating the gathering. These activities included CLE protocols such as dynamic mindfulness, circles, personal narrative, and storytelling to build and sustain relational trust, shift power dynamics, and gather evidence for analysis. After each meeting, I analyzed and coded agendas, meeting transcripts, meeting notes, documents, and other artifacts. Part of the CPR work was reviewing and updating district systems, which included district-level communication.

Table 5

*Research Question & Data Sources*

*Research Question: How do school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust between and among each other and foster innovation?*

| Research Area of Inquiry | Data Sources | Triangulation |
|---|---|---|
| How do school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust? | CPR Meetings<br>1:1 Interviews<br>LE Artifacts | Reflective Memos<br>Member Checks |
| How do school leaders and central office administrators improve the conditions necessary to foster innovation? | CPR Meetings<br>1:1 Interviews<br>LE Artifacts | Reflective Memos<br>Member Checks |
| How does coherence and trust between and among school leaders and central office administrators foster innovation? | CPR Meetings<br>1:1 Interviews<br>LE Artifacts | Reflective Memos<br>Member Checks |
| How does conducting this study contribute to my leadership development? | CPR Meetings<br>Reflective Memos<br>1:1 Interviews | |

*Note.* * Co-Practitioner Researchers (CPR); * Learning Exchange (LE).

*1:1 Interviews*

I conducted 1:1 interviews with CPR participants a couple of weeks after each LE as part of the study portion of the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle. I held these interviews virtually on Zoom or Google Meet, with a transcript feature add-on. I informed each participant of the transcript, and they verbally agreed before each meeting to proceed. The interviews were semiformal, with predetermined questions followed by informal space to allow for follow-up questions and to explore areas of intersection with the study (see Appendix F). The specific participants interviewed in each cycle can be found in Chapters 4 and 5.

*Reflective Memos*

Reflective memos are a practice by which researchers can gain understanding through observing the experience and observing oneself in the experience. I used a structured form for reflective memos based on the four-step cyclical process proposed by Kolb (1984). I wrote at least four reflective memos for each of the cycles (see Table 6). These cycles of reflective memoing are a way to move beyond expressing feelings or assumptions and link thinking to research and action. The reflective memos also serve to triangulate the data to ensure the validity of the analysis.

**Study Limitations**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) refer to reflexivity as the act of a researcher reflecting on their role in the study and how personal background, culture, and experiences can potentially shape interpretation. The CPR can contribute to collaborative action research with others invested in the issue and agree on the need for action (Herr & Anderson, 2014). One key consideration in PAR is the researcher's role within the project (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Herr & Anderson, 2014). I am the direct supervisor of the math coordinator and have positional

Table 6

*Reflective Memo Process*

| Steps | Actions |
|---|---|
| Engage in an Experience | Observing and participating in the experience |
| Reflection on the Experience | Initial meaning-making and noticing |
| Conceptualize the Experience | Bringing in research, conceptual framing, and other analyzation |
| Plan for Experimenting | Use the first three steps of the process to pivot to action. What are you going to do with this reflection? |

*Note.* Kolb, 1984.

power in the structure of the district organizational chart. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the possibility of the power differential in the different participants. I was cautious about gathering informed consent from each participant without coercion or a sense of obligation. I articulated to each CPR member that participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they could pull themselves from the project without resentment or reprisal.

I received Institutional Review Board approval of my study *Greater than the Parts: How central office administrators and school leaders build coherence and trust* on September 20, 2021 (see Appendix A). I completed the Institutional Review Board Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (IRB CITI) certification on January 2, 2021 (see Appendix B). I received approval from the Superintendent of my district on August 25, 2021 (see Appendix C).

**Internal Validity**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) see validity as one of the strengths of qualitative research and recommend that research proposals identify and discuss multiple strategies to check the accuracy of their findings. I describe my findings in such a way as to convey the shared experience. I used member checks and the reflective memoing process to triangulate different sources and ensure validity.

Member checking is a protocol for determining the validity of findings by taking them back to participants to see if they feel they are accurate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The data taken back is "polished or semi-polished" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 200), such as significant findings, themes, or case analysis. For this project, I conducted follow-up interviews with CPR members after each LE, allowing them to comment on the analyzed data. I also embedded a member check on the February 02, 2022, LE, and August 04, 2022, LE.

A vital aspect of internal validity is creating an open and honest narrative of the bias I brought to the study as the primary researcher. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain how good qualitative research contains comments by the researcher about their gender, culture, history, and socioeconomic origin, among other factors. I considered my positionality and internal biases throughout the study.

**External Validity**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) advise caution when considering qualitative findings' transferability or external validity. The project took place within the specific context of one Northern California Unified School District. The findings may be generalized, but the nature of this PAR project does not lend itself to broad generalization. One study with three schools is highly influenced by the immediate geographical and social context. While there is external validity to other district schools and beyond, their particular context would have to be fully understood to apply any findings from this study. The procedures and processes undergirding this study are replicable. They may support leaders in other organizations seeking to build trust and coherence between and among site leaders and central office administrators.

<div align="center">Confidentiality & Ethical Considerations</div>

The Co-Practitioner Researchers (CPR) in this study were central office administrators and site leaders with action space to adopt and implement an alternative math curriculum at their schools. Based on their implementation of Illustrative Mathematics (IM), I selected the sites to bring the leaders into common conversation and not due to the nature of any particular curriculum. I know and have worked with every participant in different capacities. I am the immediate supervisor of the district math coach and have positional power in the structure of the district organizational chart. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the possibility of a power

differential between participants. I met with each participant individually to present the nature of the project. In these meetings, I emphasized the voluntary nature of their involvement and had each participant complete the consent form before engaging in the study (see Appendix D).

I use pseudonyms to ensure the confidentiality of the schools and participants of this study. Before beginning the study, I had all the needed approvals and consent forms (see Appendices A, B, C, & D). I present all data without judgment and use it transparently with the CPR and other educators. I stored all essential files in a password-protected folder. All appropriate data and reports were shared openly with the CPR group before being placed in the protected file.

## CHAPTER 4: PAR PRE-CYCLE

The Focus Of Practice (FOP) of this Participatory Action Research (PAR) project is how school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust. My theory of action is that if coherence and trust are built between and among school leaders and central office administrators, then the required conditions to foster innovation will improve. I used Learning Exchanges (LEs) to gather leaders for activities that enhance coherence and trust. For the PAR Pre-Cycle, I planned activities in collaboration with the Co-Practitioner Researchers (CPRs) to consider existing systems that support the implementation of alternative curricula. In this chapter, I share the study's context (place and people), the process I used during the PAR Pre-Cycle, codes and emergent categories, reflection on leadership, and the first PAR cycle planning.

### PAR Context

I developed this project from my experience in a meeting where site leaders responded negatively to central office administrators imposing a restrictive system on curricular flexibility (see Figure 5, Appendix H). Trust and coherence are also personal topics for me, as I have experienced the loss of these key considerations during my career in education. I focused on the leaders of three schools and three central office administrators, including myself. I invited the principal, vice principal, and instructional coach from the three schools to participate in the project. I work in the central office as the Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. I invited two other central office administrators to participate in the project: a central office coordinator and the District Mathematics Instructional Coach. Before discussing the PAR Pre-Cycle, I consider the context of place and people for each group in the following subsections.

| Level of Waiver | Level of Implementation **of Board Adopted Curricula** | Level of Supplement | Component of the Board adopted Curriculum the Site will implement with 100% Fidelity | Component of the Supplemental tool that will be utilized |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| NONE Level 0 | 100% | 0% | Reading Workshop with Units of Study (50%) Writing Workshop with Units of Study (25%) Phonics Workshop with Units of Study (25%) | NA |
| Waiver level 1 | 75% | 25% | Writing Workshop with Units of Study (25%) Reading Workshop with Units of Study (50%) | Phonics Materials (25%) |
| Waiver level 2 | 50% | 50% | Writing Workshop with Units of Study (25%) Phonics Workshop with Units of Study (25%) | Reading Materials (50%) |
| Waiver level 3 | 25% | 75% | Writing Workshop with Units of Study (25%) | Reading Materials (50%) Phonics Materials (25%) |

*Figure 5.* Levels of waiver.

**Context (Place)**

The study context is three schools within four miles of each other in one school district across two cities in Northern California, including seven densely populated suburbs along a major south-to-north interstate highway. Marble Elementary School (MES) is K–6, Opal Elementary School (OK8) serves grades K–8, and Garnet Middle School (GMS) serves grades 7–8. All three schools are in different phases of implementing Illustrative Mathematics (IM). In the Fall of 2021, when this study began, MES was in the first year of implementation, GMS in the third year, and OK8 in the fifth year.

All three schools were part of a Community Of Practice (COP) funded by a local charitable foundation supporting charter and public schools in the area. The COPs began in 2018 and ran through 2021. The foundation funded attendance for district leaders at the Standards Institute conference in 2019. This conference highlighted an EdReports ranking of different curricula, and the site leaders who attended concluded that some district-adopted curricula were not standards-aligned or rigorous (LE, 10.19.21; SP 1:1, 11.5.21). This issue of rigor and standards alignment was summarized well by S. Parnasis in a 1:1 interview. At the Standards Institute, there were "… conversations of like, well, are you providing rigorous baseline curriculum to all of your students? And then that's where all of us in the COP landed; where we're like, Oh Snap! These standards aren't the standards anymore. Now we need to go out and find curricula that are right" (SP 1:1, 11.5.21).

I chose Marble Elementary School (MES) as a focal school because the principal organized the initial curricular flexibility meeting. He and his team have strong feelings about the effect of a high-quality curriculum on student achievement and equally strong feelings about what they saw as arbitrary percentages of required implementation of the adopted text (see

Figure 5). According to the California Department of Education website, MES has 490 students in grades K–6, of whom 55.9% are designated English learners, 94.9% socioeconomically disadvantaged, 5% homeless, and 7% identified as qualifying for special education supports. The four largest recognized ethnicities enrolled at Marble Elementary School in 2020, listed alphabetically, were as follows: 17% African American, 2% Asian, 74% Latinx, and 5% White. MES is a community school with many families walking to school from homes in the area. Most of the houses in the community were built to support workers drawn to the area in support of shipbuilding during World War II. Many of these bungalows are now multifamily homes.

The principal of MES has been at the school since 2014. During that time, he has cultivated a strong leadership team consisting of a vice principal, a math coach, and an English language arts (ELA) coach. During the Learning Exchange to analyze assets and challenges discussed in Chapter 1, the MES team determined that this coherent leadership lessened what had been historically high levels of teacher turnover. Due to budget cuts and COVID-19-related issues, the turnover returned to nearly 50% in the 2021–2022 school year.

I chose Opal Elementary School (OK8) to bring together multiple schools serving different grade levels in various implementation phases. At the beginning of this project, educators at OK8 were in the fifth year of implementing IM. According to the California Department of Education, OK8 in 2020 had 572 students in grades K–8, of whom 50% were designated English learners, 96% socioeconomically disadvantaged, 2% homeless, and 15% identified as qualifying for special education supports. The four largest recognized ethnicities enrolled at OK8, listed alphabetically, were 12% African American, 3% Asian, 80% Latinx, and 1% White. OK8 is located centrally in the community, and most families walk their students to school.

District leadership decided to extend Opal to a K–8 in 2018 to combat the loss of students to charters between the sixth and seventh grades. The administration shifted at the start of the 2021-2022 school year, causing a domino effect between the administrators and the academic coach. The longtime principal left for a central office position in a neighboring district just before the Pre-Cycle. The vice principal became the principal, and the math coach became the vice principal. The leaders and community believed this internal promotion would allow for the continuity of the vision and program.

By including Garnet Middle School (GMS) in the project, I am bringing together schools with one year, three years, and five years of implementing IM and the associated relationship with curricular flexibility under different chief academic officers and curriculum directors. According to the California Department of Education website, GMS had 769 students in grades 7-8 during the 2020–2021 school year. The demographic breakdown of those students was as follows: 45% were designated English learners, 94% socioeconomically disadvantaged, 3% homeless, and 13% identified as qualifying for special education support. The four largest recognized ethnicities enrolled at GMS, listed alphabetically, were 7% African American, 5% Asian 83% Latinx, and 4% White.

As a middle school, GMS has more formal leadership structures with a principal, two vice principals, two instructional coaches, and two counselors. As a team, they see the onsite coaching as integral to creating and maintaining momentum for the implementation. The GMS team was in the third year of using IM as core instructional materials at the beginning of this project.

**Context (People)**

I invited the principal, vice principal, and instructional coach from each school, myself, and two other central office administrators for a total of 12 invitees. This group comprises the Co-Practitioner Researchers (CPR) and the Learning Exchange (LE) participants. I invited the 12 leaders to the first LE, and five attended: the principal of MES, the vice principal of OK8, the vice principal of GMS, the district math coach, and me. The math coach of Marble Elementary School declined the invitation, stating that she was spread too thin with her site duties to take on the project. The principal of Opal K–8 wanted to participate, but she felt it would be too much to assume the principalship and participate in the study.

To understand the context of the people involved in this study, I added a set of scripted questions to the initial 1:1 interviews from Appendix F. The questioning structure moved from a more biographical focus to reasons for becoming an educator, how they see themselves in work, and how the community views them (see Table 7). I purposely left the questions somewhat broad to avoid leading the participants toward specific answers. These interviews took place on Google Meet between October 14 and November 21, 2021.

*Central Office Team*

I am the lead researcher and the Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. I invited two other central office administrators to include different perspectives on curriculum development and instructional innovation. The two central office administrators are L. Moon, the District Math Instructional Coach, and M. Anders, a central office coordinator.

I was born in 1974 in the Northern California city that houses the district offices. I did not realize until the writing of this chapter that the three schools I chose to work with made a roughly equidistant triangle around the hospital I was born in on the main street. I did not attend the

Table 7

*Context (People) Interview Questions*

| Context | Interview Questions |
|---------|---------------------|
| Biographical | How long have you worked in education? |
| | How long have you worked in this district? |
| | How long have you worked in your role? |
| Why Education? | What brought you to choose to work in education? |
| Identity | How does your identity impact the people you serve? |
| | What are some challenges or benefits your identity or the |
| | perception of your identity has with the school community? |

schools included in this study, but the neighborhoods that encompass these schools are part of

the fabric that makes up the quilt of my youth. I received my degree in History and returned to

teach in the district from which I graduated to support the youth of my community. I chose to

work in schools deemed "failing" anecdotally in my community-based knowledge and more

formally through state scores. Teaching is the best job I have ever had. I decided to move into

administration because of the increased effect size of administrative roles. I worked as a site

administrator for 13 years until accepting the director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment

position in 2020. An essential aspect of my role is adopting and implementing high-quality

curricula that meet our students' needs.

L. Moon has worked in education for 30 years and the district for 26. He worked as a

central office instructional coach for four years and as a site math coach for the three previous

years. After taking courses on the sociology of education and anthropology of education as an

undergraduate, L. Moon became a teacher. He was interested in developing an understanding of

why schools lead to different outcomes for students. He stated that "I've always been kind of an

underdog sort of person, like pulling for the one that doesn't have what everybody else does"

(LM, 1:1, 11.10.21). L. Moon wanted to understand better why some children are successful and

some are not, ultimately leading to him considering what he could do to impact underserved

students in our educational system.

L. Moon is a strong leader who is passionate and knowledgeable about math curriculum

and instruction. He was not a math major but had the skill-set to pass the California competency

test, which qualified him for a single-subject math credential. As a district math instructional

coach, L. Moon works closely to support math instruction, including the three schools in this

project using an alternative curriculum for their core math instruction. He considers his ability to

have a positive outlook and build relationships key to his success. He also considers himself good at organizing and thinking through long-term planning.

M. Anders is a central office coordinator in a role created to support special projects related to Deeper Learning supported by a grant from a family foundation. The foundation provided a two-year grant with an opportunity to extend that leaders chose not to pursue due to a change in district leadership and shift in priorities. This lack of a secure position caused some anxiety for M. Anders as she worried about her place in the district. When asked how long she worked as an educator, M. Anders answered that it was forever, and 11 years formally. The forever comment was about her teaching swimming, being a camp counselor, and having classroom paraprofessional and other non-credentialed teaching roles since her teenage years. She began working in the classroom when the youngest of her children had negative experiences in school. She discussed how he is brilliant but did not thrive in traditional school. M. Anders became an aide, teacher, principal, and central office administrator to create systems that support all learners.

### *Marble Elementary Team*

A. Jones has been the principal of Marble Elementary School for seven years. Before becoming principal, he was an upper elementary grade teacher. His core belief is that literacy is the primary equity issue in schools. A. Jones is open about his journey as an educational leader having bumps. Specifically, he shares that initially, he did not know how to lead early literacy and would focus his feedback on management issues. His entry into advocating for an alternative curriculum came from his belief that reading is a civil right and that the district had chosen a curriculum that did not support his community. He strongly focuses on using data to ensure that every student has the foundational skills necessary to succeed in school.

P. Rawlins began teaching in 2002. Her mother was an educator, and when P. Rawlins chose a degree that she deemed impractical, she convinced her to add a teaching credential. P. Rawlins was sure she would never use this credential, but she found the transition natural when she moved to California to work for a nonprofit focused on pregnancy prevention with teens. She said, "I just realized that we were at the tip of the iceberg in terms of what we could do to help kids open up the possibilities for their lives" (PR, 11.17.21). P. Rawlins has been the vice principal at MES since 2017. She feels like a community member but is aware of her differences as a middle-class white woman of a different religion than most of the MES population. She believes she needs to be a reflective learner in relationship with staff and community, which is key to continuing to grow as an educator.

### *Opal K–8 Team*

After the birth of her first child, W. Charles decided she wanted to focus on supporting students of color in realizing their dreams. She became vice principal at Opal K–8 School (OK8) in the Fall of 2021 after the longtime principal moved to another district and the vice principal assumed the principalship. Before taking the math coach position in 2017 at OK8, W. Charles was an elementary school teacher in a neighboring community. Before that, she was one of a group of employees at a healthcare company who conducted outreach at local high schools. Through this experience, she saw that many students did not know the opportunities available to them. W. Charles said she wanted to find a way to reach these students earlier.

As the previous math coach and current vice principal, W. Charles brings a firm grounding in practices and curriculum implementation at OK8. In addition, she is a black female educational leader with strong feelings about past professional experiences in a Southern California school similar to OK8. This has given her a specific perspective on how central office

decisions marginalize communities of color. A seminal time for her as a child that shaped her identity as an educator was when "instead of improving the school, they bused us to the Central Valley, to a completely different community" (WC, 1:1, 12.16.21). She expressed great dissatisfaction with the waves of gentrification in Northern California school districts. She felt that as soon as this gentrification began, resources began to find their way to the area through charter schools or updated facilities. W. Charles agreed to be a part of the project during our 1:1 when she felt that her voice might help change district policies around how we support local context (WC, 1:1, 12.16.21).

### *Garnet Middle School Team*

P. James has been the principal of Garnet Middle School since 2015. She came to Garnet as vice principal from the high school into which Garnet students matriculate. P. James participated in Teach for America and worked as an English teacher before becoming an instructional coach at the high school. She received her MA in Instructional Leadership and Administrative Credential from a local university program focused on equity in schools. She brings this equity and instructional lens to her role as principal. In her tenure as principal, the proficiency data has improved marginally. She and her team focus on other levels of data that indicate that learners are becoming more optimistic about their learning. This immediacy of low proficiency scores and high student needs frustrates P. James but is also the catalyst for her high energy and passion for her work.

I was unable to sit with S. Parnasis for the context-related 1:1 interview. She did participate in two Learning Exchanges (LEs) and one 1:1 interview focused on discussing the October 19, 2021, Learning Exchange. S. Parnasis was a teacher and instructional coach before assuming the position of vice principal. One of her core principles is focusing on the value of

instruction for improving student outcomes. She finds the role of vice principal frustrating, as it draws her away from enacting adaptive change, forcing her to be reactive to the daily disciplinary needs.

B. Jackson is the mathematics and science coach at Garnet Middle School (GMS). After spending eight years teaching science and coaching other science teachers in a nearby district, B. Jackson joined GMS in 2018. She stated she was eager to join the project because she is interested in how leaders can ease impediments that limit innovation. Specifically, she is very interested in standards-based grading and has been frustrated by how the database does not support teacher adoption of innovative grading policies.

B. Jackson came into the district with some guilt over the unearned benefits of growing up middle class and white. Her parents are educators and work in schools and districts predominantly of students of color. B. Jackson decided to work in education because her best friends had taken teaching positions and convinced her to do so. She feels that one of her great strengths is engaging as a listener, which she feels can lead to her being too passive, so she is working on being more directive when needed. She feels she builds strong relationships with students, but students experience this differently, depending on the circumstance. B. Jackson articulated that some boys see her as "doing too much" because she fusses at them when they are not complying with school procedures (BJ, 1:1, 11.30.21).

### PAR Pre-Cycle Process

I began the PAR Pre-Cycle in the Fall of 2021 (see Table 8). I planned each PAR Cycle, including the Pre-Cycle, to include one LE bringing together the Co-Practitioner Researchers (CPR) members. I followed the LE with a 1:1 interview with participants. In addition, I wrote reflective memos throughout the process in response to the activities or aspects of my graduate

Table 8

*Pre-Cycle Timeframes*

| Activity | Timeframe | Participants |
|---|---|---|
| LE | 10/19/21 | AJ, SP, BJ, PJ, MA, WC |
| 1:1 Interviews | 10/15/21 – 12/20/21 | AJ, LM, MA, BJ, PJ, PR, SP, WC |
| Reflective Memos | 9/1/21 – 12/17/21 | Lead Researcher |

work. Each activity produced data I analyzed and coded to move from a general to a more specific understanding, as outlined in Saldaña (2016). I discuss the activities I designed and implemented to gather data in the Activities subsections.

**Learning Exchanges**

The Community Learning Exchange is a framework developed to support community members coming together for engaged, deep collaborative learning. During the CLE, participants examine collective challenges and gifts and freely share ideas for improvement that can change systems and each individual (Guajardo et al., 2016). For this project, we co-designed cross-organization agendas using the CLE axioms. Due to the CPR group and overall participants of the collaborations being the same, I termed our gatherings as Learning Exchanges instead of CLEs to capture the somewhat different intentions.

The Pre-Cycle Learning Exchange (LE) occurred on October 19, 2021, at 3:30 pm (see Appendix I). I designed the Pre-Cycle LE to bring participants together to build relational trust, narrate our experiences as educators, understand the scope of the proposed PAR study, and explore our and other people's alternative curriculum journeys. Although the initial design of the study was for nine participants, I invited 12 to account for personnel changes between the design phase and the PAR Pre-Cycle. Of those 12, five attended the Pre-Cycle LE: A. Jones, the principal of Marble Elementary School (MES); W. Charles, the vice principal of Opal K–8 School (OK8); P. James, the principal of Garnet Middle School (GMS); S. Parnasis, the vice principal of (GMS), and myself. I collected consent forms from the five attendees.

Throughout the study, the Learning Exchanges followed the same format and structure. These include an opening agenda overview, Dynamic Mindfulness, Personal Narrative, and core activities based on context and need. I wanted to help the co-practitioner researchers relieve the

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day's stress and enter the collaboration ready to partner with other educators. Dynamic Mindfulness is a trauma-informed technique that blends action, breathing, and centering (Niroga Institute, 2021). Personal Narratives are stories of human experience that can be used as crucial pedagogy and provide windows into the views of different worlds and people (Guajardo et al., 2016). I built the Personal Narrative around participants' curricular experiences to engage them more deeply in the work.

After the Dynamic Mindfulness and Personal Narrative portions of the agenda, I decided to deviate from my initial plans. I intended to follow with an activity where participants used a Jamboard to map their curricular journey and consider perceived central office support. As the conversation unfolded, I opted not to engage in the intended activity. The deep conversation about what curriculum is and how it affects our students was rich and meaningful to the participants. Allowing the Learning Exchange (LE) to flow through the conversation brought the participants closer to Praxis, which Paolo Freire described as reflection and action (Freire, 2000). LE axiom 1 states that learning and leadership are dynamic social processes, and axiom 2 states that conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes. In addition, although people often think of cycles of inquiry as step-by-step, a blend of structure and flexibility in research design can lead to more substantial results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

**1:1 Interviews**

After the Learning Exchange (LE), I reached out to schedule a 1:1 interview with each Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR). I had three goals in the design of these interviews: asking questions to get to biographical, educational, and identity context; a more informal conversation structure to capture takeaways from the LE, considering the most meaningful scope and

sequence for the project; and gathering more data on trust and innovation to triangulate with the LE data.

I invited each CPR member to participate via Google Meet (a virtual platform that emulates a face-to-face conversation) to engage in a 1:1 interview. I followed the script in Appendix F for this initial set of meetings. Each participant gave verbal consent before I engaged the transcript feature. I used the scripts formally before veering to follow up on the participants' lines of interest. I also used the 1:1 interviews to think collaboratively about building the next LE.

**Reflective Memos**

I wrote reflective memos following the Kolb (1984) four-step sequence throughout the PAR Pre-Cycle. Some memos were in response to graduate school readings or assignments, others were in response to activities conducted for this study, and some captured an experience or conversation in another space that helped me better answer the research questions. These memos served to capture my thoughts and my ongoing meaning-making process. At the same time, the memos provided an outlet for me to develop and consider codes and emerging categories.

**Coding**

I designed this project through a constructivist lens, centering meaning forged through interactions with others. I used the actual words of participants as often as possible as I moved from the raw data to the codes and categories (Saldaña, 2016). Traditionally, qualitative researchers use open coding, the predominant form of coding for this project (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2016). I also acknowledge pre-existing research on trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis,

2015) by beginning with some pre-established codes, which Saldaña (2016) recommends if previous research helps define the codes.

As I considered the data sets, I kept in mind that coding is a heuristic or "exploratory, problem-solving technique" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 12). I wanted to ensure that I was doing more than labeling and examining the data in such a way as to link disparate data. Saldaña (2016) called the code the essence of capturing data that, when clustered together, can allow the researcher to derive meaning. For each of these data sets, my process was similar. I inserted a three-column table in which the first column was raw data that I would highlight. The middle column was my first pass at coding, where I pulled out verbatim sections and possible initial codes. In the third column, I continued refining the coding and tabulated the frequency of codes emerging from the data.

I chose to hold the Learning Exchange (LE) and 1:1 conversations in Google Meet to utilize the transcript feature that captured the collaboration in Google Docs. I initially expected to record the meetings, but the transcript feature allowed me to interact with the data in a fruitful way for my analysis. I inserted a three-column table on the top to code the data and copied and pasted the transcript into the left column. I read the transcript for general understanding and highlighted seminal thoughts, words, and passages before making another pass, pulling out specific ideas, and noting them in the middle column. I used the third column to collate emergent codes that seemed possible to connect to larger patterns or themes.

Once I coded the LE transcripts and two 1:1 interview documents, I felt I needed to capture all of the data in one place to triangulate better the aggregate data, codes, and emergent categories. I created a Google Sheet with the growing codebook on the first tab. Subsequent tabs represented the data captured from an individual activity. At the top of each page listing

| Category | Code | | | Total Frequency | Memos | CLE.10.19.21 | 1:1.ML.10.27.21 | 1:1.RP.11.20.21 | 1:1.P.S.11.5.21 | Fre | Magn |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Coherence | vision | v | high | 12 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 1-5 | low |
| Coherence | alignment | a | high | 12 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 6-10 | medium |
| Coherence | curriculum | s | medium | 11 | 1 | 6 | 3 | | 1 | 11-15 | high |
| Coherence | systems | s | medium | 8 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | | |
| Coherence | churn | l-o | medium | 8 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | | |
| Coherence | institutional knowledge | v | low | 5 | 1 | | 2 | 1 | 1 | | |
| Coherence | instructional core | v | medium | 6 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | | |
| Coherence | feedback | s | low | 5 | 1 | | 2 | | 2 | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Trust | benevolence | | low | 1 | 1 | | | | | | |
| Trust | reliability | | low | 2 | 1 | | 1 | | | | |
| Trust | competence | | medium | 8 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | | |
| Trust | honesty | | low | 1 | 1 | | | | | | |
| Trust | openness | | low | 2 | 1 | | 1 | | | | |
| Trust | vulnerability | v | low | 2 | 2 | | | | | | |
| Trust | proximity | p | medium | 9 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | | |
| Trust | commiserate | p | low | 4 | 1 | | | 1 | 2 | | |
| Trust | communication | | low | 5 | 2 | 1 | 2 | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Support | validation | | low | 7 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | | |
| Support | mental health | | low | 5 | 2 | | | 1 | 2 | | |
| Support | lack of | | high | 13 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | | |
| Support | C-O Support | | high | 13 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | | |
| Support | adult learning | and v | medium | 8 | 2 | 3 | 1 | | 2 | | |
| Support | ease/obstacle | | medium | 10 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | | |
| Support | sustain | s | low | 3 | | | | 1 | 2 | | |
| Support | communication | | | 6 | 2 | | 2 | 1 | 1 | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Innovation | autonomy | | medium | 10 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 | | |
| Innovation | agency | | low | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 | | 1 | | |
| Innovation | school improvement | v | low | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 | | | | |
| innovation | curriculum | rigor--v | medium | 10 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | | |

*Figure 6.* Codebook example.

activities, I linked the raw data for reference before copying and pasting the codes and emergent categories. This organizational structure allowed me to flip back and forth between different data sets to confirm initial impressions of the codes and possible categories. At that point, I inserted another sheet with a sum function that tabulated the frequency (see Figure 6, Appendix J).

<p style="text-align:center"><b>Emergent Categories</b></p>

By analyzing the data, I was able to begin collapsing codes into emerging categories. I utilized magnitude coding by assigning them a low (1–5), medium (6–10), or high magnitude (11 or more) based on the frequency of occurrences in the data. I used this frequency to begin to collate emergent codes that seemed possible to collapse into categories or themes. I also factored resonance into the emergence of codes and categories. Three categories emerged during the coding of the LE, 1:1 conversations, and my reflective memos in the Pre-Cycle. They are trust, coherence, and support (see Appendix J).

**Trust**

The work of Saldaña (2016) states that although open coding is the norm in qualitative studies, existing research may lead to pre-existing codes being useful in coding. For this study, I use the five facets of trust from Tschannen-Moran as predetermined large codes. The five facets of trust are benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness (Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015. These five facets surfaced in the LE and 1:1 interview data but were most helpful in framing my understanding of trust in my reflective memos. I used the five facets to better understand the data emerging from the activities and link the initial coding to the emerging categories and themes. Table 9 illustrates the five pre-existing codes and the three codes that emerged through open coding.

Table 9

*Trust Codes*

| Code | Magnitude |
|---|---|
| Benevolence | low |
| Reliability | low |
| Competence | medium |
| Honesty | low |
| Openness | low |
| Vulnerability | low |
| Proximity | medium |
| Commiserate | low |
| Communication | low |

Of the five predetermined codes, Benevolence, Openness, Reliability, and Vulnerability emerged at low frequency, and Competence occurred at medium frequency. Early in the project, the data did not support Reliability as frequent or resonant, but there was some indication that it might. In addition, research indicates that Vulnerability is a condition for willingness to innovate, as educators are more willing to experiment with new practices when levels of trust are higher (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). During the Pre-Cycle, Vulnerability remained a consideration that would surface in such a fashion as to end up one of the Critical Levers in Cycle Two.

Proximity was not predetermined and arose from the data. I used Proximity to code data about time or spaces that bring people together to work collaboratively. Codes linked to Proximity surfaced at medium frequency. Proximity resonated with the CPR and seemed a fruitful area for analysis as the work progressed. During the 1:1 conversation, SP shared, "not only do we need to share, but we also need to, just like, have the opportunity talk to each other and learn from each other" (SP, 1:1 interview, 11.5.21). Once I completed the coding, I collapsed several codes into Proximity, which became one of the Critical Levers for trust in my findings.

The code Commiserate came directly from the words of SP in our 1:1 interview (SP, 11.5.21): "[W]e were kind of able to do some, like, best practices share, just kind of on the fly, or at least be able to kind of commiserate together and know that we're not the only ones dealing with x, y, and z." Although the frequency of Commiserate found in this data set was low, it was meaningful and resonated from multiple sources (see Appendix J). The Commiserate codes identify conversations with little structure that allow leaders to commiserate over the difficulty of school leadership. Commiserate and Best Practices emerged as different sides of the same coin.

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Agendas designed for educators to Commiserate or to consider Best Practices seemed possible to appear as a support for leaders.

**Coherence**

Although Coherence is central in the question driving this project, aiming to build coherence and trust between and among school leaders and central office administrators, it was not a predetermined code during the Pre-Cycle. However, the construct of Coherence surfaced repeatedly in the Pre-Cycle data set. Seven codes related to Coherence emerged from the Pre-Cycle data set (see Table 10).

*High-Frequency Coherence Codes*

Vision and Alignment were the two most frequent codes throughout all activities (see Appendix J). Vision in this context is how a leader articulates goals to the school community to align resources and actions behind that vision. All the school leaders involved in this project attended the Standards Institute, where they conducted a curriculum review that convinced them that the district-adopted curriculum was not standards-based or rigorous (LE, 10.19.21; PS, 1:1, 11.5.21).

The experience with this conference led to leaders returning to school with a clear Vision of the need to change curricula. Upon their return, the school leaders articulated their understanding of the need for change and their Vision for improving student outcomes. This Vision was compelling to the teachers, and the leaders used a rigorous curriculum to create Alignment around the curriculum. In the case of Illustrative Mathematics, this Vision was academic discourse and ambitious math tasks. Although this project is not curriculum-specific, how leaders used curriculum decisions to create coherence was a pattern in the Pre-Cycle. S. Parnasis articulated the impetus to find an alternative math curriculum during the LE: "… it's

Table 10

*Coherence Codes*

| Code | Magnitude |
|---|---|
| Vision | high |
| Alignment | high |
| Curriculum | medium |
| Systems | medium |
| Churn | medium |
| Institutional Knowledge | low |
| Instructional Core | medium |
| Feedback | low |

just kind of irritating that like we've had common core state standards since like 2012. But there was no good curriculum out there until like two or three years ago" (SP LE, 10.19.21). This thought led her and the rest of the Garnet Middle School team to create a Vision of school improvement that included the adoption of IM and practices around implementing this curriculum effectively.

### *Medium-Frequency Coherence Codes*

Curriculum, Systems, Churn, and Instructional Core were other ideas that surfaced at a medium frequency (see Table 10, Appendix J). As I was analyzing the data, I considered collapsing the Systems and Curriculum codes, as the participants seemed to discuss the systems for implementing a new curriculum. In subsequent cycles, I confirmed this initial analysis and collapsed Curriculum into the emergent Systems category. Churn, or the high amplitude of personnel change, surfaced as a negative pull on coherence, arose at a medium frequency, resonated with the CPR, and remained an area of high interest throughout the study. During my 1:1 with P. Rawlins on November 17, 2021, she spoke about how trust developed through a strong vision and thoughtful collaboration. Leaders articulated that MES lost a combined 50% of the teachers between the 2020–21 and 2021–22 school years. P. Rawlins also spoke about how institutional knowledge is linked to Churn, and the loss of this knowledge led to a lack of coherence and inefficiencies in training new personnel (PR, 1:1, 11.17.21).

Another thought about building coherence came from A. Jones, who said that instead of trying to find Alignment with the same curriculum, the CPR might be more effective in aligning the data we use to judge the efficacy of the curriculum (LE, 10.19.21). He identified his belief that the culture of autonomy is positive. Although the new district leadership seemed to prioritize alignment and compliance over autonomy, there is a way to create alignment through

how we discuss and compare data rather than through how we mandate curriculum. This thought

and the other Pre-Cycle data helped me understand how site leaders and central office

administrators build trust and coherence.

**Support**

Many codes related to the emergent category of Support surfaced during the Pre-Cycle

(see Table 11). Through analysis and conversation with CPR members, I understood support as

how leaders create conditions that lead to and sustain positive mental health in educators. This

feeling of support can help educators achieve professional goals and ease obstacles.

*Lack of Central Office Support*

Lack of Support and Central Office Support both surfaced at high frequencies. The Lack-

of code emerged most often about a lack of central office support. This code came up at high

frequency in the data as the reason for leaders opting to engage in an alternative curriculum (see

Appendix J). Leaders felt that the central office-facilitated process had led to a substandard

eight-year mathematic curriculum adoption (LE, 10.19.21; 1:1 SP, 11.5.21). Adopting alternative

curricula added to a lack of capacity to offer coaching or professional development to support the

existing curriculum, which led to a feeling of a Lack of Support.

*Overall Lack of Support*

In addition, participants believed there was a lack of overall support that was not specific

to the central office (LE, 10.19.21). This Lack of Support manifested in coding as an unnamed

locus of support, a lack of planning (or ability to plan) for COVID-19-related needs, or other

areas that did not rise to notable frequency or resonance. This area seems fruitful for further

consideration.

Table 11

*Support Codes*

| Code | Magnitude |
|------|-----------|
| Validation | low |
| Mental Health | low |
| Lack-of | high |
| C.O. Support | high |
| Adult Learning | medium |
| Ease/Obstacle | medium |
| Sustain | low |
| Communication | low |

*Adult Learning & Ease/Obstacle*

Adult Learning and Ease/Obstacle both emerged at medium frequency. Based on the codes and conversations, I define Ease/Obstacle as any mention of impediments to or supports for practice. I chose to separate this from other aspects of Support because there were frequent mentions of how a lack of district support impeded innovation that seemed resonant with the Co-Practitioner Researchers. Initially, I thought the Ease/Obstacle category might become more akin to issues endemic to education leading to needless hurdles. S. Parnasis illustrated these hurdles during the Pre-Cycle LE on October 19, 2021: "I could probably manage this by myself, but then that is all coupled with the fact that no system seems to be effective or is working." This statement is indicative of the broader conversation where she articulated how the cumulative effect of each of these Obstacles makes fixing any single issue far more difficult.

**Sustain**

Sustain was a code of low magnitude but high resonance with participants. Through analysis of the codes and conversation with participants, the meaning of Sustain emerged as interactions or activities that enervate leaders by centering the experiences that make education meaningful to them. S. Parnasis articulated during our 1:1 interview how important it is for central office and site leaders to consider actions that support educators by creating sustaining spaces: "I spend all day long giving and giving and giving and caring and caring and caring, but then I need something to sustain me, right?" (SP, 1:1, 11.5.21) She expounds that she found meaning in observing classroom practices and focusing on pedagogy. Unfortunately, discipline or COVID-19-related logistics often pulled her away from the soul-filling actions that drew her to educational leadership in the first place. "… [I]t's like I can't get in, to doing observation. I'm talking about just evaluations, like nothing else, right?" (SP, 1:1, 11.5.21).

Considering the data, I found Support to be a Critical Lever for building trust. Support codes would continue to emerge throughout Cycles One and Two. Initially, many of these codes were negative because they were of Lack-of codes. Although this was not clear during this phase of the study, I later found understanding by collapsing these Support codes into the category and Critical Lever of Support. In the reflection and planning section, I consider the PAR Pre-Cycle and discuss planning for PAR Cycle One.

## Reflection & Planning

My initial learning from the PAR Pre-Cycle process was technical. Through iteration, I developed a system of capturing, coding, analyzing, and reflecting on the data, but it took a series of inefficiencies to hone my process. For instance, Google Sheets was not ideal for capturing and considering the data, as the formatting made working with the data more complex. I spent much time and energy on the process rather than analyzing the data. Ultimately, my answer was using the transcription add-on to Google Meet, which pulls the transcript into Google Docs, where I made three columns. I used these columns to guide three read-throughs and data capture, leading to the codes I used to develop emergent categories and findings.

As a novice coder, it is unsurprising that my coding process changed as my understanding grew. For instance, I intended to use in vivo coding as the step after initial highlighting, but as I went back through my initial codes, I used a blend of in vivo and descriptive coding. While either of these coding strategies was a good choice, finding consistency in my methods took time. Another area of initial inconsistency was tabulating frequency. While the final form of gathering frequency I settled on was strong, it required me to go back and do some recoding to account for incoherent strategies. Saldaña (2016) said this level of recoding is often necessary, especially for the novice coder.

One pattern that emerged in the Pre-Cycle and continued throughout the study was that leaders who readily agreed to participate did not show up consistently. This pattern began with the initial LE on October 19, 2021, where five leaders out of 12 attended. The study's design was for nine participants, but I asked three more leaders, who did not participate, to account for some personnel changes before the PAR Pre-Cycle LE. Additionally, leaders who did not attend gave no notice. I invited each of the 12 leaders to a 1:1 interview, and seven met with me. I collected consent forms for any participant I had not collected before or during the LE. When leaders agreed to participate in September 2021, they could not have known how the year would proceed or the level of staff burnout we would encounter due to COVID-19. I coded leader fatigue in the Support category during the Pre-Cycle. This pattern continued throughout the study and confirmed Support as an emerging critical lever for building trust.

## Conclusion

The three categories that emerged from the Pre-Cycle data were Trust, Coherence, and Support. These emerging categories were the first steps in answering the research question at the heart of this study: How do school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust between and among each other and foster innovation? By analyzing the Pre-Cycle data, I closed in on my eventual findings and honed in on six Critical Levers to increase coherence and trust between and among site leaders and central office administrators.

In Chapter 5, I discuss PAR Cycles One and Two. For Cycle One, the co-practitioner researchers and I designed two Learning Exchanges for Spring 2022 using the same agenda format. The specific topics were mapping the existing curricular flexibility systems and designing systems for how we judge the efficacy of alternative curricula. Cycle Two took place in August 2022 (Table 12). I developed a Learning Exchange focused on member-checking the

Table 12

*Spring 2022 Activities*

| Timeframe | PAR Cycle One Activity |
|---|---|
| January 2022 | Finalizing CLE Agendas<br>Outreach to Site and Central Office Leaders |
| February 2022 | Community Learning Exchange 2/8/22<br>1:1 Interviews |
| March 2022 | Community Learning Exchange 3/8/22<br>1:1 Interviews |
| April 2022 | 1:1 Interviews |
| May 2022 | Coding and Recoding |

findings on coherence. There was also a second activity where I used an existing district meeting that I led to have members of the district assessment team member-check the trust findings. The activities and data collection strategies that I explore in Chapter 5 are in Table 12.

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) Cycle One took place during the Spring

semester of 2022. Through iterative analysis of the data produced during the study activities, I

approached answering my overarching research question of how school leaders and central office

administrators build coherence and trust between and among each other and foster innovation.

This chapter explains how I analyzed data and collapsed categories into emerging themes. I also

realized that while the themes of Trust and Coherence are central to the study, the data suggest

that there are Critical Levers that leaders can use to drive their planning to increase coherence

and trust and, thus, foster innovation. I found three levers for building trust: Proximity, Support,

and Vulnerability. Moreover, I found three levers for building coherence: Vision, Alignment, and

Systems.

## PAR Cycle One Process

In the Spring of 2022, I designed the actions and events of the PAR Cycle One to collect

additional data to help answer the overarching research question. Once I collected the data from

all activities, I collapsed the data with what I gathered from the PAR Pre-Cycle. I brought the

data analysis from codes to categories, themes, and finally, to six Critical Levers that increase

trust and coherence. The PAR Cycle One activities are illustrated and described in Table 13.

**Let the Winds Kind of Roll: Learning Exchange 02/08/22**

I designed the February 08, 2022, Learning Exchange (LE) agenda to explore the current

district systems of curricular flexibility (see Appendix K). The goal was to examine existing

resources and build a rubric for leaders contemplating adopting an alternative curriculum. The

Personal Narrative (PN) section of the meeting for this LE deviated from my typical PN of

diving into personal experiences that align with the central theme or outcome of the LE. Instead,

Table 13

*PAR Cycle One Activity Dates*

| Activity | January | February | March | April |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Learning Exchanges | | 02/08/22 | 03/22/22 | |
| 1:1 Interviews | MA | AJ, BJ, LM | WC, SP | PJ, LM |
| Reflective Memos | 01/03/22 | 02/04/22 | 03/15/22 | 04/06/22 |
| | 01/28/22 | 02/18/22 | 03/19/22 | |
| | | | 03/22/22 | |

I designed the PN portion to communicate the codes and categories and gather group input on the validity of these emerging findings (see Figure 7).

Part of the design of the February 08, 2022 Learning Exchange was in response to comments from P. James during our 1:1 interview (12.8.21). During the interview, I tallied five times that she articulated her positive feelings for the Illustrative Mathematics (IM) curriculum and how she knew I was a proponent. I had stated multiple times that I chose IM as the focal content area to lessen any noise within the study design rather than for any belief related to the content itself. This misconception of the study design struck me because I did not want to lose sight of the broader focus of practice (FOP). For this reason, I spent five minutes at the opening of the February 08, 2022 LE clarifying the study design. The clarification was that although I am a proponent of IM and curriculum is a piece of our work, this PAR project's FOP is how school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust.

There were eight participants in PAR Cycle One. Two invitees had not participated in any activity, and I did not include them in Cycle Two. A third did not respond and did not attend. Five participants responded to the calendar invite that they would attend. Four leaders participated in the February 08, 2022 Learning Exchange: A. Jones, L. Moon, M. Anders, and myself. Seven leaders participated in 1:1 interviews: A. Jones, B. Jackson, L. Moon, M. Anders, P. James, S. Parnasis, and W. Charles. I analyzed the data to capture emerging categories and codes. As I coded the data, nine categories emerged at a higher frequency: Vision, Alignment, Churn, Systems, Commiserate, Innovation, Autonomy, Curriculum, and Central Office (see Table 14).

| 3:40 | **_Personal Narrative_**<br>5m-Read through the following.<br>FOP: How school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust. Discuss with a partner:<br><br>● Given the data I coded from the previous PAR Cycle, did I capture statements, and am I correctly representing you and the study? |
|---|---|
| | ● Proximity: building spaces for educators to come together<br>● Commiserate: Sometimes just being able to vent and know others are in the same space is cathartic and beneficial to the work.<br>● Communication can be of great benefit or an impediment. |
| | ● Vision: Clear vision and mission can help leaders get people moving in the same direction.<br>● Alignment: Aligning adult learning, resources, time, etc., is essential to achieving goals.<br>● Churn: The continued changes in personnel (admin, teacher-leaders, teachers) make coherence difficult. Have to rebuild culture through a time-consuming, mindful onboarding. |
| | ● The lack of: People are feeling a distinct lack of support across the board.<br>● Central Office or the lack thereof: Unsure of the weight of this theme, as some of my questions are C.O.-centric and may skew the conversation.<br>● Ease/obstacle: Systems or the lack thereof can make things easier or harder. HR/staffing is the most common example. |

_Figure 7_. Learning Exchange 02/08/22 emerging categories & codes.

Table 14

*Learning Exchange 02/08/22 Frequency Chart*

| Themes | Emerging Categories | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Coherence | Vision | 3 |
| Coherence | Alignment | 4 |
| Coherence | Systems | 5/lack of 3 |
| Coherence | Churn | 5 |
| Trust | Commiserate | 3 |
| Support | Validation | 4 |
| Support | Lack of | 3 |
| Support | C.O. Support | 3 |

**Just Blowing Smoke: Learning Exchange 03/22/22**

I designed the agenda for the March 03, 2022 Learning Exchange (Appendix L) to gather data on how leaders could interrogate and narrate the efficacy of their alternative curriculum implementation. The meeting was online, and we used Jamboard, a tool designed for taking collaborative notes in a virtual space. Participants opened the Jamboard, which had the three levels of data found in Street Data (Saffir & Duggan, 2020): satellite, map, and street (see Figure 8). I developed a Personal Narrative (PN) that led participants to consider the percentage of analysis they spent on each level. We built trust and coherence by slowing the conversation and discussing the relationship between where we think we should focus versus how we spend our time on student academic data (GC RMemo, 03.22.22).

Once we completed the Personal Narrative, we looked at the satellite assessment data from STAR Renaissance. The STAR assessments are the District grade-level benchmarks that I oversee as part of my work as the Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. Leaders brought their site academic data to the meeting. CPR members shared their data and discussed different academic and experiential data sets that we could capture to better understand students' school experiences.

Six co-practitioner researchers participated in the March 08, 2022, Learning Exchange (LE): B. Jackson, P. James, S. Parnasis from the GMS leadership team, W. Charles from the OK-8 leadership team, A. Jones from the MES leadership team, and me, the lead researcher and central office administrator. Attendance at this LE was higher than in previous meetings. A possible reason for the higher attendance is that I outlined to CPR participants that I needed at least one participant from each school as part of a district review of the alternative curriculum review. While this requirement was appropriate for the district work that we engaged in judging

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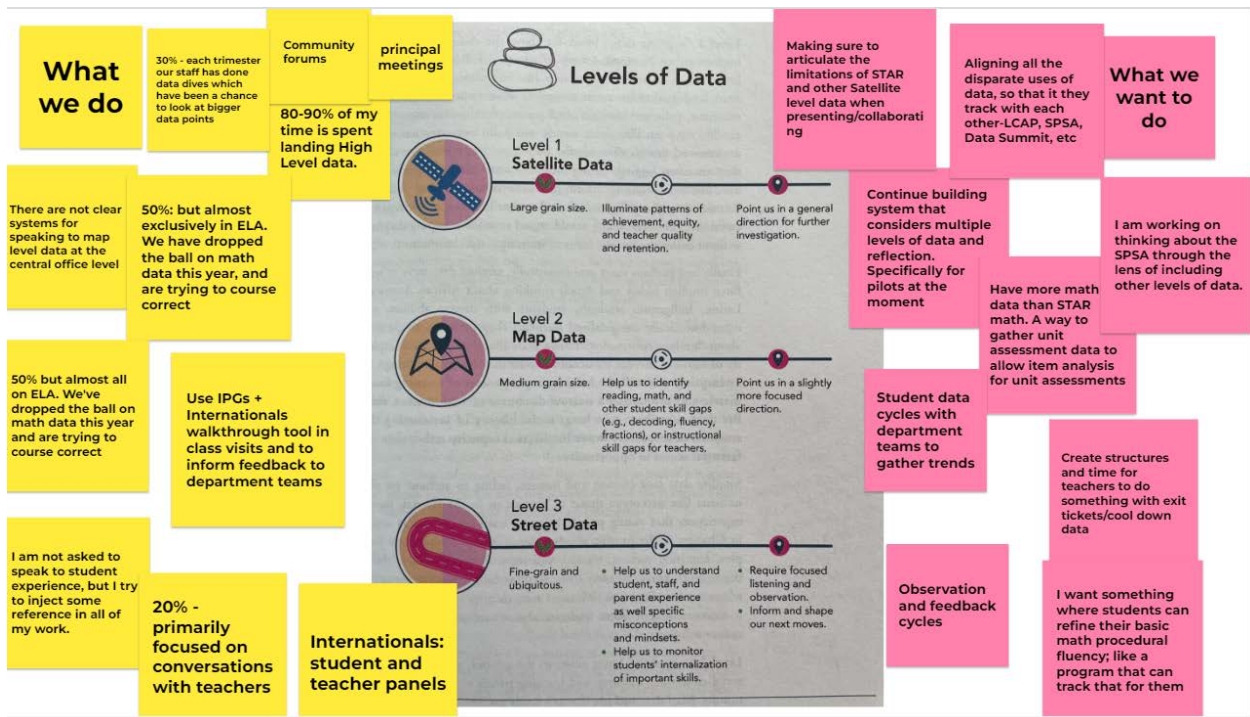
*Figure 8.* Data Jamboard activity.

the efficacy of IM implementation, I recognized I need to be mindful of my positionality in the district hierarchy. While some of this work is for the district, I clarified that my study was not part of the district. To ensure that everyone agreed to my collecting data in this LE, I received verbal permission that they understood that the data collection piece was wholly voluntary and that they wished to participate. I do not believe my positionality impacted the data.

I analyzed the data from the Jamboard, the transcript of the virtual meeting, and my notes. During this analysis, 11 categories emerged at a high frequency of between three and seven occurrences. Vulnerability, Validation, and Lack of Support occurred with the highest frequency. In addition, Churn remained a significant category, although not across the threshold of five occurrences that I set for a high magnitude (see Table 15). I explore the categories for each theme in the Honing in on Building Trust and Coherence section later in this chapter.

**Super Tangly at the Moment: 1:1 Interviews**

Throughout PAR Cycle One, I met with five individual CPR members and one member, L. Moon, twice for a total of six interviews. These interviews were a mix of formal questions from the interview protocol (see Appendix F) and informal conversations in response to ideas during the more formal portion of the interview protocol. I scheduled each interview for 30 minutes; however, they typically lasted for an hour due to high levels of engagement and a willingness to explore topics that arose in the formal and the informal questioning. I conducted all interviews on Google Meet with the transcript feature enabled.

Nine categories emerged at a high magnitude during the coding of the 1:1 interviews, a frequency of between six and 11 occurrences for this coding session. There were four Coherence

Table 15

*Learning Exchange 03/08/22 Frequency Chart*

| Theme | Categories | Frequency |
|-------|-----------|-----------|
| Coherence | Alignment | 3 |
| Coherence | Curriculum | 4 |
| Coherence | Churn | 4 |
| Coherence | Systems | 2 |
| Trust | Vulnerability | 5 |
| Trust | Commiserate | 3 |
| Support | Validation | 7 |
| Support | Lack of Support | 5 |
| Support | C.O. Support | 4 |
| Support | Ease/Obstacle | 3 |

categories: Alignment, Curriculum, Systems, and Churn. There were two Trust categories:

Proximity and Commiserate. There were three Support categories: Lack-of, Central Office

(C.O.) support, and Sustain (see Table 16). In the following section, I more fully explore and

explain the findings and how I use them to better understand how to increase trust and

coherence.

## Honing In on Building Trust and Coherence

The Focus of Practice (FOP) for this Participatory Action Research (PAR) project is how

school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust. Through this study's

intentional design, I uncovered evidence of critical levers for building trust and coherence. In the

next subsection, I outline the process for collapsing the data from the PAR Pre-Cycle with the

data collected from PAR Cycle One into three Critical Levers for building trust: Proximity,

Support, and Vulnerability; and the three Critical Levers for building coherence: Vision,

Alignment, and Systems.

### Collapsing the Data

Examining the data sets for individual activities helped me combine codes into categories

for analysis. Saldaña (2016) said that codes become part of a larger "scheme of classification"

placed into categories (p. 48). Saldaña recommends labeling and analyzing portions of the data

with a comprehensive thematic statement. As I examined the data in this study, it became clear

that the comprehensive thematic ideas or themes are Trust and Coherence. Specifically, the

nature of the research questions was gravity that pulled the data toward these more significant

themes. Upon completing data collection for PAR Cycle One, I combined all the categories with

Table 16

*1:1 Interview Frequency Chart*

| Theme | Categories | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Trust | Proximity | 6 |
| Trust | Commiserate | 7 |
| Support | Lack of Support | 6 |
| Support | C.O. Support | 8 |
| Support | Sustain | 6 |
| Coherence | Alignment | 6 |
| Coherence | Curriculum | 6 |
| Coherence | Systems | 11 |
| Coherence | Churn | 9 |

a frequency of at least two in Table 17. Through this analysis, I honed in on the six Critical Levers for building trust and coherence. Saldaña (2016) stated that theming the data is appropriate for qualitative studies. For this study, I themed the broader schematic classification as the themes of Trust and Coherence. I used the term Critical Levers to collapse the categories into positive actions that leaders can take to interrupt the Fragmentation and Churn that arose as negative categories throughout the study (GC RMemo, 10.21.21; GC RMemo, 01.03.22).

The first theme I collapsed was Innovation. The main research question for this study is: How do school leaders and central office administrators build trust and coherence between and among each other and foster innovation? Fostering innovation was a foremost consideration in the design of this study. Through analysis, I determined that although Innovation is central, Trust and Coherence are the main themes of this study. The categories for the theme of Innovation are essential and warrant further research but were not the central findings of my work in this study. Although Innovation was frequent and highly resonant with participants in analyzing the data, it was not as prominent as Coherence and Trust.

Support was a code and category throughout this study (see Appendix J). As I considered the entire data set, I realized the Support codes fit best collapsed into Coherence and Trust. For instance, the Support category of Validation was a building block for trust. It arose first in the Pre-Cycle from P. James (PJ LE, 10.19.21) when she asked what she would get out of the LE meetings. Through coding, I triangulated this set of questions with another code. She spoke of the lack of value of sitting in the district-led meetings and concluded that she was not getting the support she needed. P. James did not see her expertise as valued in the meeting space (GC RMemo, 01.28.22). During Cycle One, A. Jones noted that there had never been alignment conversations led by the district, which made him feel a lack of trust that his time would be

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Table 17

*PAR Cycle One All-Activities Chart*

| Theme | Category | Magnitude | Total Frequency | 1:1 Frequency | LE Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Coherence | Vision | Medium | 9 | 4 | 5 |
| Coherence | Alignment | High | 10 | 6 | 4 |
| Coherence | Curriculum | Medium | 8 | 6 | 2 |
| Coherence | Systems | High | 21 | 11 | 8 |
| Coherence | Churn | High | 14 | 9 | 5 |
| Coherence | Institutional Knowledge | Low | 6 | 4 | 2 |
| Coherence | Instructional Core | Low | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Coherence | Feedback | Low | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Trust | Benevolence | Low | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Trust | Reliability | Low | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Trust | Competence | Low | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| Trust | Honesty | Low | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Trust | Openness | Low | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Trust | Vulnerability | Medium | 7 | 0 | 7 |
| Trust | Proximity | High | 10 | 6 | 4 |
| Trust | Commiserate | High | 13 | 7 | 6 |

Table 17 (continued)

| Theme | Category | Magnitude | Total Frequency | 1:1 Frequency | LE Frequency |
|-------|----------|-----------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|
| Trust | Communication | Low | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| Support | Validation | High | 13 | 2 | 11 |
| Support | Mental Health | Low | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Support | Lack of Support | High | 14 | 6 | 8 |
| Support | Adult Learning | Low | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Support | Ease/Obstacle | Medium | 7 | 2 | 5 |
| Support | Sustain | Low | 6 | 6 | 0 |
| Support | Communication | Low | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| Innovation | Autonomy | High | 12 | 4 | 8 |
| Innovation | Agency | Medium | 9 | 4 | 5 |
| Innovation | School Improvement | Low | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| Innovation | Curricular Rigor | Medium | 7 | 3 | 4 |

honored in district-level meetings (AJ LE, 02.08.22). Each of these instances was of a leader either losing or building trust for the organization when they did or did not feel supported. Through analysis, my thinking deepened, and I realized that Support is a category within the broader theme of Trust. Moreover, as I further considered the emerging categories, Support emerged as a Critical Lever for increasing trust.

Including Support, which I collapsed into the Trust theme, there were four categories with a medium or high magnitude: Support, Vulnerability, Proximity, and Commiserate. Commiserate was a code that emerged initially in the Pre-Cycle. I defined it as sympathizing with others and building empathy for another's experience. Commiserate was still an important category, but in analyzing the data, it seemed more appropriate to collapse Commiserate into the Proximity category. Initially, I defined Proximity as evidence that people being in the same place (physical or virtual) can lead to greater trust. As I analyzed the data and collapsed the codes and categories, I began to see Proximity as a Critical Lever for increasing trust. The evidence from this study points to how leaders can bring people into Proximity and intentionally design collaborative spaces to increase trust.

During PAR Cycle One, five Coherence categories had a medium or high magnitude: Vision, Alignment, Curriculum, Systems, and Churn. I designed this study around Illustrative Mathematics (IM), but it was never about the curriculum. I chose three schools implementing the same curriculum to give us a common language and work as we considered trust and coherence. Therefore, I omitted Curriculum as a category because it seemed a byproduct of the study design rather than a Critical Lever for understanding coherence. Churn was the category that emerged most throughout the study and remained a central finding. Still, it is an impediment and outcome

rather than a lever to be considered by leaders. The Critical Levers are actions that combat the barrier of Churn within education.

**Six Critical Levers**

I built this study around the central research question: How do central office administrators and site leaders build trust and coherence between and among each other and foster innovation? I found six Critical Levers for building trust and coherence. The three levers for building trust are Proximity, Vulnerability, and Support. The three levers for building coherence are Vision, Alignment, and Systems. I explore this relationship in Figure 9 and in the subsections that follow.

**Critical Levers for Building Trust**

I researched the nature of trust in educational publications and research. In the literature review, I began with the five facets of trust advanced by Tschannen-Moran as likely codes or categories: Benevolence, Reliability, Competence, Honesty, and Openness (Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). These five facets were integral to my growing understanding of trust and helped me uncover the three Critical Levers for building trust: Proximity, Vulnerability, and Support.

*Proximity*

Proximity emerged early as a vital consideration for building trust. During PAR Cycle One, Proximity had a high magnitude in the data from the LE and 1:1 Interviews with a frequency of 13 occurrences. An example of the power of Proximity comes from a reflective memo that followed my 1:1 Interview with S. Parnasis, which followed the February 08,
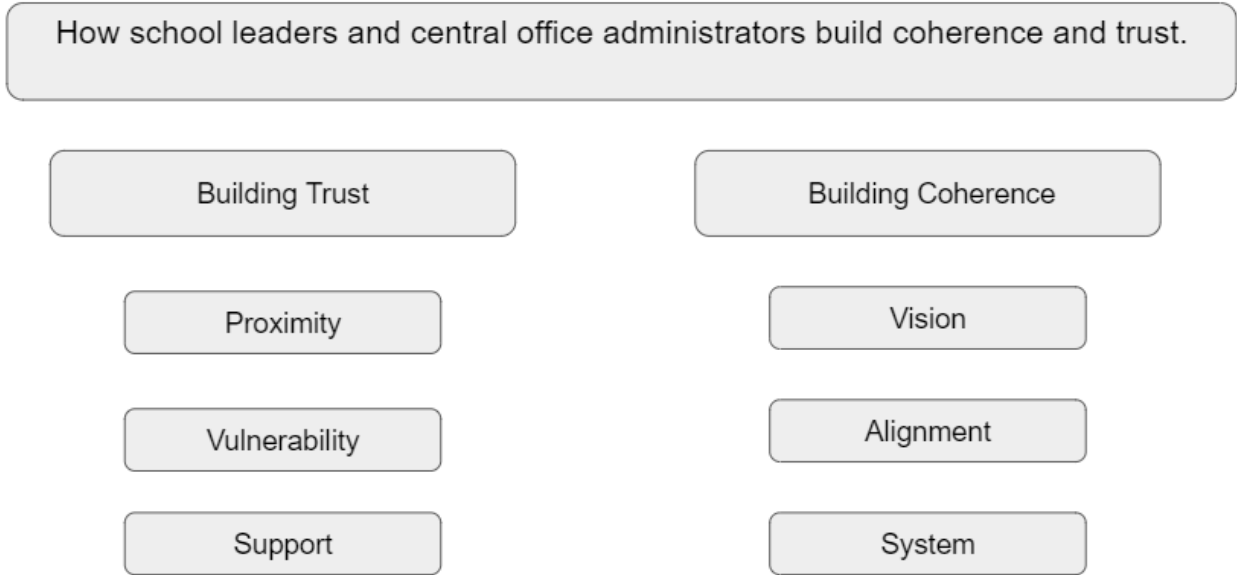
*Figure 9.* Focus of practice, themes, and six critical levers.

2022, Learning Exchange. After the LE and the 1:1 interview, she contacted me three times for different district work-related questions. Before this study, we knew each other, but it was clear that our increased Proximity (as defined in this study) increased the trust between us. Through this building of trust, S. Parnasis looked to me for questions in daily practice. One of these questions required her to admit that she had not paid attention in a meeting I led. Her increased trust supported this admission for me. By coding the 1:1 interview and my Reflective Memo, I zeroed in on Proximity as a Critical Lever for increasing trust (1:1 P.S.11.5.21, GC RMemo, 11.15.21).

Through the PAR Pre-Cycle and Cycle One, Proximity emerged as action that leaders can take to build trust. In my codebook (see Appendix J), I initially defined Proximity as evidence that people being in the same space (physical or virtual) can lead to greater trust. As the study progressed and I collapsed Trust codes, I broadened the definition of proximity, which connotes nearness in space or relationships. I kept the naming of Proximity, though my extended description is about how leaders can bring leaders together into collaborative spaces intentionally designed to increase trust.

Well-planned activities can create or improve the conditions that support trust-building. I built agendas and activities to increase trust, and the data suggests I was successful. I designed every agenda with dynamic mindfulness, contributing directly to the increasing willingness to be vulnerable. By developing plans and actions to take advantage of the physical or virtual proximity, I increased the trust necessary to deepen dialogue and improve the conditions for innovation.

*Vulnerability*

Vulnerability emerged as a Critical Lever for building trust. During PAR Cycle One, Vulnerability had a medium magnitude in the data from all activities with a frequency of seven occurrences (see Table 17). After reading Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2018) I use the word vulnerability to mean the act of risking detrimental outcomes such as poor student performance, professional embarrassment, judgment, or formal criticism. Vulnerability emerged as a code during the PAR Pre-Cycle when B. Jackson paused before talking about how she would proceed into a vulnerable space. Specifically, she said, "I feel like I've been working really hard in my role, and I don't feel always very supported by the district, and so I'm just kind of like being vulnerable here. ..." She continued to say, "Are the coaches provided job security? ... I get stressed out every February, and I have a hard time working through it" (BJ LE, 03.22.22). This conversation helped me answer the research question about building trust by indicating that the Learning Exchange practices I used to construct the LEs led to a willingness to engage in uncomfortable conversations that require a leader to place themselves in a vulnerable position. The trust that B. James and the team built during the opening of the LE and through our collaboration on thinking through some sticky topics made her feel comfortable engaging in a conversation about how traumatic she finds the yearly anxiety about whether she will have a job. Ultimately, this fear led to B. James resigning from the district to move to a more secure position in a neighboring district.

Throughout the coding process, Vulnerability emerged as central to deepening the discourse and pushing innovation. Vulnerability is a factor among educators within and between schools, sites, and the central office (Daly et al., 2015; Schwabsky et al., 2020). The Vulnerability was evident in the guarded nature of initial conversations and the growing trust

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leading to a greater willingness to open up and share thoughts and feelings with the CPR group. As explored above, B. James expressly referred to her choice to be vulnerable when articulating her feelings of lacking support from the district-level administrators. This choice to engage in a deeper dialogue arose through repeated conversation and deepening trust (BJ LE, 03.22.22).

I was in the March 22, 2022, Learning Exchange as the face of district leadership. We built trust by creating opportunities for site leaders from three schools and central office administrators to collaborate. I began every meeting with a Personal Narrative intended to build trust. I intentionally created the other activities in a tight and loose model to drive the conversation forward and allow time to connect. Doing so increased the willingness to be vulnerable, as evidenced by the increasing frequency of vulnerability-related codes as the study progressed (see Appendix J; GC RMemo, 03.22.22).

While the discussion throughout the study was valid, the discourse began at a more surface level, and people were listening to each other but not pushing on the ideas. In the Pre-Cycle, I termed the emergence of the negative discourse Commiserate, which was close but did not capture the nuance of the concept. Coding the data from Cycle One clarified that Commiserate was limited in understanding what was happening. To understand the emerging theme of Trust, the categories of Proximity and Vulnerability are central. By bringing leaders into proximity to tackle sticky problems, we were able to increase trust and increase leaders' willingness to be vulnerable. Part of the vulnerability was a willingness to voice frustration and express ideas in the open (GC RMemo, 03.22.22).

*Support*

Support initially arose as an emergent category in the PAR Pre-Cycle. I define Support as codes illustrating how leaders build systems or act to improve other educators' ability to function

or carry out their work. The Support codes and category also apply to the theme of Coherence. Analyzing the data, I included Support as a Critical Lever for increasing trust. The data emerged strongly as a negative, where the lack of support can lead to a lack of trust in the organization. For this reason, Support is a Critical Lever for Trust that I simultaneously coded as Coherence codes (see Table 17).

The importance of support emerged as an essential consideration before the study officially began. I conducted a Learning Exchange (LE) on November 18, 2020, to uncover the assets and challenges that may influence the study design. In this LE, P. Rawlins spoke about how the lack of district support led to increased teacher turnover and was a barrier to sustainable school improvement. She was feeling anger and decreased trust in the organization, leading her to be somewhat fatalistic about how the school would progress. In the Pre-Cycle, Support was a category with four codes of a medium or high frequency, which captured between eight and 13 occurrences in the data (see Appendix J). During Cycle One, it became clear that Support was integral to understanding Trust.

During the March 03, 2022, Learning Exchange, B. Jackson spoke on the nature of not feeling supported:

> I feel like I've been working really hard in my role and I don't feel always very supported from the District, and so I'm just kind of like being vulnerable here, and just it's an ask. I just really feel like the District energy should be adopting IM. Like I don't really know the District politics right now. (BJ LE, 03.22.22)

This quote is evidence of several thoughts converging into an educator's understanding of her perception of the District's support, her trust for the District, and how central office support should look. After this, she spoke about the possibility of her leaving her position, which I coded

as Churn. Educational organizations are highly complicated. This study highlights the importance of building feelings of being supported, which increases trust and, in turn, the willingness to be vulnerable and innovate.

The data from this study reinforce existing research with leaders being willing to engage in more profound discourse when they feel more trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Daly et al., 2015; Schwabsky et al., 2020). We increased trust by bringing leaders together to build systems of support around a curricular implementation that was important to them. The increased trust resulted from more than the system we created together. By coming together to collaborate on complex educational issues, we created Proximity that raised trust and, therefore, the willingness to innovate (GC RMemo., 3.22.22).

I designed this study to answer the question: How do school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust between and among each other and foster innovation? By designing agendas and activities with this and the sub-questions and analyzing the data sets, I found that Coherence and Trust are central themes for increasing leaders' willingness to engage in innovation. My findings indicate that this central tenet of the study design is correct.

The Critical Levers of Proximity and Vulnerability validate and may extend existing research. Relational trust is fundamental to creating and sustaining lasting change in schools (Bryk, 2010). Higher levels of trust can lead to higher levels of collaboration partly due to innovation's vulnerable nature (Daly et al., 2015; Gray & Summers, 2016; Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Practical school change efforts require admitting that current practices need improvement. The data from this study and existing research support the assertion that educators are more willing to experiment with new approaches when higher levels of trust are present (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Participants increased the conditions that support

innovation through the study activities. Research shows a correlation between trust and innovation, which supports the findings that the LE structure and a focus on trust and coherence lead to increased innovation (Daly et al., 2015; Schwabsky et al., 2020). I explore the three Critical Levers for increasing coherence in the next subsection. I use increase and build interchangeably for this study.

**Critical Levers for Building Coherence**

Coherence is central to the literature review and design of this study. Forman et al. (2018), authors of *The Internal Coherence Framework*, define coherence as the collective capability of the adults in a school building or an educational system to connect and align resources to carry out an improvement strategy. For this study, coherence is data evidence of the connection of different parts of the organization with the people engaged in the work while holding a shared focus and purpose (see Appendix J). I continue by examining the three Critical Levers for building coherence: Vision, Alignment, and Systems.

*Vision*

Vision emerged as a critical lever for building coherence. I define Vision as evidence of leaders creating, communicating, or implementing an ambitious plan for school improvement. During PAR Cycle One, Vision had a medium magnitude in the data from the LE and 1:1 interviews with a frequency of nine occurrences.

One potent example of the Critical Lever of Vision within the study is when P. Rawlins cited the leadership of A. Jones at MES as an example of how vision and alignment can lead to solid systems and increased coherence (PR, 1:1, 11.17.21). She discussed how much change the school had undergone in recent years. A. Jones was not solely responsible for these changes, as several leaders had pushed implementation improvement further. She felt that his enduring

Vision for improvement allowed those other leaders to excel. She also mentioned Churn as a significant barrier in the classroom teaching ranks and at the teacher-leader level. She and A. Jones helped overcome those barriers by staying focused on aligning actions around the Vision. One specific example is how MES was struggling with severe teacher shortages like other schools in the district. Unlike other schools, though, the leadership team at MES stayed committed to a literacy strategy that required significant student movement between classes and could only be accomplished with the administration of the school spending many days teaching classes (PR, 1:1, 11.17.21; GC RMemo, 01.03.22).

The value of a strong vision goes beyond the site level. Considering the symmetry of vision and purpose at all levels of education can increase coherence and the likelihood of implementing sustainable school improvement (Bryk, 2010; Forman et al., 2018). These conditions for coherence also extend symmetrically to central office leaders. A strong Vision helps leaders build systems and align practices and resources (Burch, 2007; Forman et al., 2018; Honig et al., 2010; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012; Schmoker, 2019; Thessin & Louis, 2019). A central office administrator must similarly have a strong vision and communicate it well (Forman et al., 2018; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012; Schmoker, 2019).

### *Alignment*

Alignment emerged as a critical lever for building coherence. Based on data for this study, I define Alignment as evidence of actions taken to make practices and implementation intentionally support intended goals and outcomes. During PAR Cycle One, Alignment had a high magnitude in the data from the LE and 1:1 Interviews with a frequency of nine occurrences.

I outlined one example of the importance of Alignment in the vision section. P. Rawlins spoke about how A. Jones had aligned his leadership to the vision he set. What she emphasized

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was an example of aligning financial and human resources that P. Rawlins saw as fundamental to building coherence at MES (PR, 1:1, 11.17.21). In addition, during the March 22, 2022, Learning Exchange, A. Jones discussed how district leadership should strengthen policies controlling curricular flexibility to increase coherence. He felt strongly about the work he was engaged in but found the lack of district oversight to be a sign of a lack of coherence (AJ LE, 03.22.22).

Research supports A. Jones' focus on aligning classroom practices. Grubb (20010) found that when teachers work in isolation, there is a range—from ineffective to effective—in teaching practices across the school. The frame of our conversation during the March 22, 2022, LE was about adopting IM as an alternative curriculum. Many adoptions languish due to a lack of sustained alignment of adult learning on the practices associated with aligned teaching practices (Forman et al., 2018). Teachers tend to focus on the teaching practices they already know and believe they do well. To counter incoherence, leaders must align their professional learning and resources to a robust implementation vision and execute it (Forman et al., 2018).

Another example of the Alignment Critical Lever is from the February 08, 2022, Learning Exchange. A. Jones and M. Anders engaged in an essential conversation about the nature of leadership and the power of Alignment. M. Anders began this portion of the discussion by discussing how her educational philosophies differ from A. Jones's. She segued into a conversation about the alignment of ideals and outcomes, not necessarily specific practices:

> This cohesion is built around something deeper than just curriculum. It's around beliefs and practices, and we haven't spent that deep learning time as a district to get to really dig into what is good practice. What does it look like? And then who are we as a district? (MA LE, 02.08.22)

This was a powerful piece of data that not only elucidates the nature of Alignment, but also built greater trust and alignment in this meeting (GC RMemo, 02.18.22).

### *Systems*

Systems emerged from the data as a Critical Lever needed for building coherence, specifically as a counter mechanism to fragmentation and the Churn of turnover. Codes related to building systems occurred 20 times in the Pre-Cycle and 17 times in Cycle One. By analyzing this data, I surfaced Systems as one of the Critical Levers for increasing coherence.

The emergence of Systems as a coherence code came when A. Jones spoke at the March 03, 2022, Learning Exchange. He defined Systems as routines commonly understood by teachers that can counterbalance the loss of capacity or institutional knowledge (AJ LE., 03.22.22). A. Jones discussed how he works with the leadership team at his school to develop a three- to five-year plan of aligning resources and practices to try to "really slow things down a bit and think it out" (AJ, 1:1, 03.02.22). He was exploring his theory of action for building strong Systems to support his Vision.

This data point triangulates with a previous one from my 1:1 interview with P. Rawlins (PR, 1:1, 11.17.21). In that interview, she talked about how well A. Jones builds systems to support his vision. She followed up with an exploration of the adverse effects of Churn with thoughts on how he used a solid vision to focus teachers on "… making them feel connected … because there's just not enough in this work. ... Like, what else is there besides being deeply connected to your purpose and your people? To keep you here because it's certainly not going to be the salary" (PR, 1:1, 11.17.21).

Another aspect of how building Systems strengthens coherence is the act of a central office administrator designing and implementing activities that intentionally bring educators

from across the school district together to tackle challenging problems. W. Charles shared that "even the intent of having these conversations about change make it happen. Things are moving. Not one size fits all. That is hopeful" (WC LE, 03.08.22). W. Charles felt that the very act of a central office leader calling leaders together to work through sticky issues indicated an improvement from past practices (GC RMemo, 10.21.22).

I designed the study to build systems around existing autonomy policies for curricular flexibility. Schmoker (2006) highlights the value of aligning curricular systems to facilitate collaboration and deepen discourse between educators. The W. Charles example is one piece of data that supports the idea that coming together to build Systems increases coherence between and among the central office and sites. Robust Systems aligned to a shared vision increase coherence in schools and districts.

In the next section, Reflections & Implications, I reflect on my leadership actions. Specifically, I examine how I developed as a research practitioner and how the Planning Stage, Pre-Cycle, and Cycle One relate. I continue by sharing what is striking about the process and my critical learning. I conclude Chapter 5 by discussing the Cycle Two process.

## Reflections & Implications

We unearthed rich data during this study's planning phase, Pre-Cycle, and Cycle One. The data validates that coherence and trust are key themes that help leaders understand school change efforts. In addition, the study shows signs of increasing coherence and trust between and among the central office and the three schools. The six Critical Levers for improving coherence and trust are the most robust categories supported by an analysis of data.

Fragmentation is the lack of coherence, where members of an organization are not logically connected and engaged in a shared idea of the work. This fragmentation impedes

building the coherence we have previously discussed as an essential consideration. Churn emerged as a significant barrier to building coherence by removing institutional knowledge and drawing site leaders away from broader leadership initiatives because of the need to onboard new teachers into the school's culture. Churn is a problem felt at all levels of an educational organization, and many of the causes are macro level, such as a national teacher shortage exacerbated by low pay in the study district and an understaffed HR department.

We uncovered three Critical Levers for increasing coherence to combat fragmentation and churn: Vision, Alignment, and Systems. The data from this study support the conclusion that leaders who build a solid vision, socialize this vision across the scope of their work, and align resources and practices to the goal can substantially lessen fragmentation and Churn. By setting a solid Vision with Aligned Systems built to support this vision's goals, a leader can increase the internal coherence of the school.

This micro- and meso-level study of central office administrators and leaders from three schools indicates that district leaders should consider these Critical Levers to build coherence at multiple levels. In addition, these implications may extend more broadly to other groups to leaders beyond the district. This study adds to existing research on how leaders can build coherence and trust in any organizational setting.

Proximity, Vulnerability, and Support should be key considerations for central office and school leaders. The data from this study shows that the three Critical Levers increase trust. In addition, these Critical Levers may have implications beyond the study district and the three schools involved. The data from this study indicates that leaders who attend building spaces where educators are brought into Proximity to engage in activities specifically built to nurture connection and Support leaders have a greater chance of growing trust. This increased trust leads

to an increased willingness to be Vulnerable and engage more deeply in change efforts. By intentionally building the activities at the heart of this study, the CPR group supported educators and increased trust between and among central office administrators and site leaders.

I used these findings to build the last cycle to check the Themes, Categories, and Critical Levers with a broader audience within the study district. By doing so, we validated the initial indications. We engaged a more general group of educators in questioning how leaders can use these findings to help build coherence and trust in an educational system. The activities and timing for PAR Cycle Two are in Table 18.

Table 18

*Cycle Two Activities*

| Activity | Timeframe | Focus |
|---|---|---|
| LE | 08/22 | Member Checking<br>Continued building of Proximity |
| 1:1 Interviews | 08–09/22 | Member Checking<br>Furthering the understanding of increased trust among leaders |
| Reflective Memos | 09–11/22 | |

# CHAPTER 6: PAR CYCLE TWO

I designed this Participatory Action Research (PAR) study to understand better *how school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust between and among each other and foster innovation.* The Co-Practitioner Research (CPR) group participating in this study were central office administrators and school leaders from three schools in the same Northern California public school district. The participants included the principal and instructional coach from each school, the vice principal of one of the schools, and three central office administrators, of whom I am one. I describe each participant in the Context: People subsection of Chapter 3. As a central office administrator and lead researcher, I took on the role of practitioner-researcher in an attempt to better understand the study's research question and my professional work. This chapter provides a cumulative summary of the 18-month PAR design where I collected and analyzed data. I then present a set of findings generated from the evidence in this PAR project. These findings include the broad themes of Trust and Coherence. Critical levers provide warrants for each theme.

## PAR Inquiry Cycles

The Focus of Practice of this study is on how school leaders and central office administrators build trust and coherence. By creating activities to build trust and coherence, I found actions that leaders can take to build these fundamental conditions between and among each other and foster innovation. I used Community Learning Exchange (CLE) methodologies. A CLE is a framework for bringing people together for collaborative learning developed by Guajardo et al. (2016). The CLE framework supports diverse community members coming together for engaged, deep collaborative learning. I more fully explore the nature of the CLE framework in Chapter 3 of this dissertation in the Methodology section. Throughout this PAR

study, I call my meeting structure Learning Exchanges (LE) to capture the same essence of CLEs, but on a smaller scale.

For this study, I planned and implemented three Participatory Action Research cycles of inquiry beginning in the Fall of 2020 and concluding in the Fall of 2022. During each PAR cycle, I brought together the CPR group to engage in at least one Learning Exchange (LE) and other activities designed to gather data. In addition, I wrote reflective memos to triangulate and help me make sense of the data. I followed the model proposed by Saldaña (2016) and utilized sequential steps to move from a general understanding of the data to a more specific.

I identified codes and collapsed them into categories and themes by collecting and analyzing the PAR Pre-Cycle and Cycle One data. After completing the data analysis, I decided to frame the emergent themes into six Critical Levers that increase trust and coherence. Critical Levers connotes the positive actions that leaders can take to interrupt the Fragmentation and Churn that arose as negative categories throughout the study (see Appendix J).

PAR Cycle Two, the final cycle for this study, consisted of two activities, a Personal Narrative (PN) on August 01, 2022, and a Learning Exchange on August 04, 2022. I designed the first Assessment Team meeting of the 2022–23 school year to open with a Personal Narrative. For the activity, participants considered the nature of trust and the three Critical Levers for increasing trust that emerged in the first two cycles of the study: Proximity, Support, and Vulnerability. The second activity was a Learning Exchange (LE), where I shared findings on coherence. The participants of the LE were Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) members who participated throughout this study. During the LE, participants considered the nature of coherence and the three Critical Levers that emerged during the prior cycles of the study: Vision,

Alignment, and Systems. In this section, I explain the details of these activities, analyze the data, and share my findings.

**Personal Narrative**

On August 01, 2022, I called the Assessment Team to finalize the cadence of district assessments and update the assessment calendar for the 2022–2023 school year. I intentionally broadened the scope of the study beyond the Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) group to bring in more data to consider the three Critical Levers for increasing trust. I designed the Personal Narrative (PN) to engage participants in an activity on a Jamboard (a platform that allows participants to collaborate by placing digital sticky notes on a page), considering different aspects of trust (see Appendix N). Participants found the three Critical Levers of trust compelling.

The Assessment Team is a group of certificated and classified central office staff responsible for different aspects of district-led assessments. Five district leaders, including myself, attended this meeting, of whom only one was a CPR member and participated in previous Learning Exchanges (LEs). As a common practice, I extended Personal Narratives (PN) and other Community Learning Exchange methodologies into my meeting design.

For the PN portion of the meeting, the CPR group followed a protocol guiding leaders through three Jamboard pages. Each page was a prompt to engage the group in a discussion on one of the Critical Levers for increasing trust (see Figure 10 & Appendix N). I had participants take four minutes of quiet time to write their initial thoughts about the prompts, and then we spoke as a group. While we discussed, I put a few stickies on the Jamboard and also took notes. These and
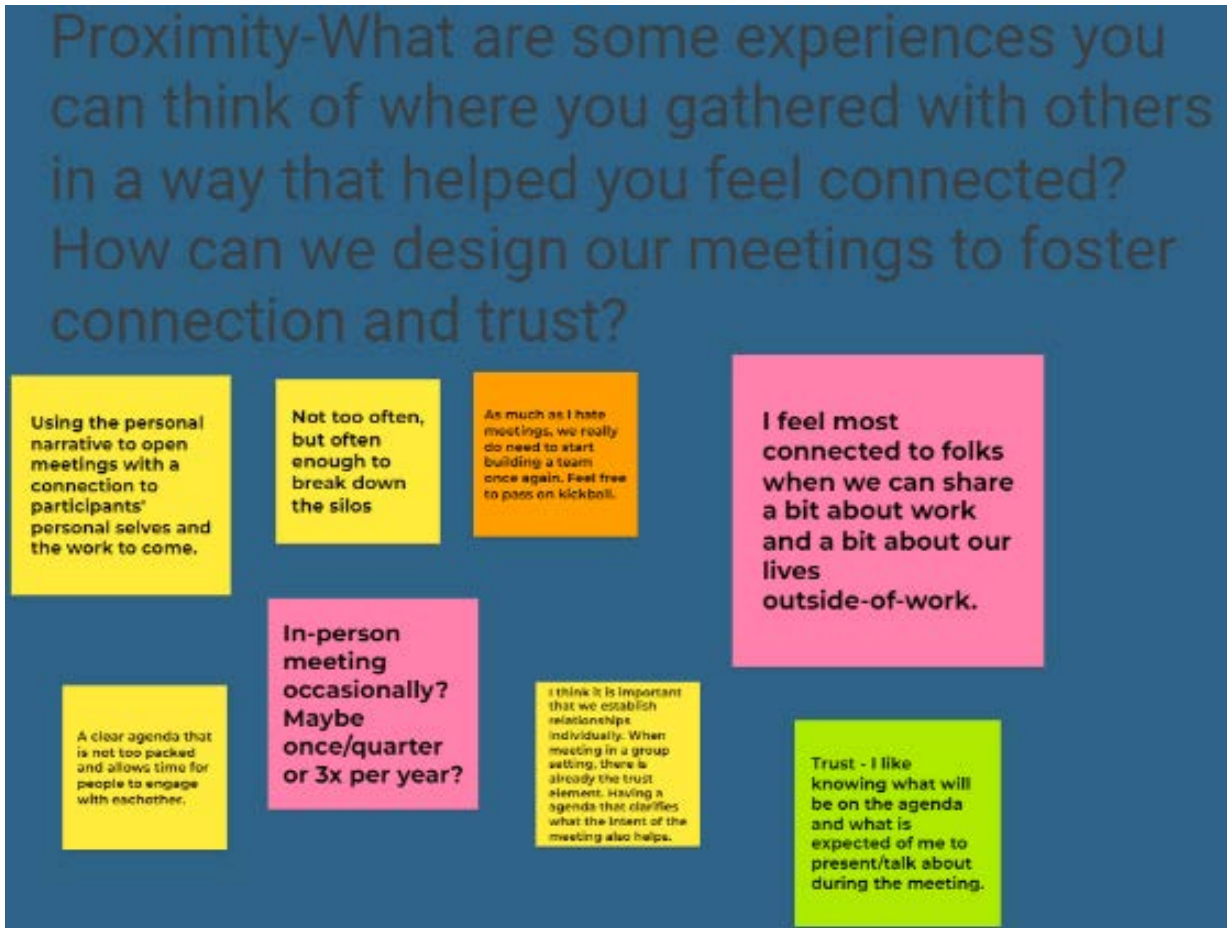
*Figure 10.* Proximity data from personal narrative.

the stickies that leaders placed on the board were sources of data. Figure 10 is an example of the Proximity page produced during the Personal Narrative on August 01, 2022 (see Appendix N).

**Learning Exchange**

The second activity of PAR Cycle Two was a Learning Exchange on August 04, 2022. I invited all Co-Practitioner Researcher members and had three attendees: M. Anders, W. Charles, and myself. I designed the agenda to explore the study's initial findings with three main sections: Personal Narrative, Product from Learning Exchanges, and Emergent Coherence Findings (see Appendix N). The Personal Narrative consisted of prompts exploring the leaders' experience of a recently attended leadership advance. The prompts for this section were how the session felt and what goals we achieved. Participants then engaged in a Jamboard activity where they placed stickies related to the questions on the board. For the second section, I showed them the product from the preceding work on designing the district system for curricular flexibility (the example was a recent assessment pilot). Lastly, we discussed the emerging findings with a graphic capturing my initial thinking about the three Critical Levers for increasing coherence (see Appendix N). Participants validated the emergent findings and found them compelling.

**Summary**

As proposed in Saldaña (2016), I analyzed the raw data from the Cycle Two activities to develop codes that I used to validate my emergent categories and themes. By combining the data from the activities of all three PAR cycles, I was able to deepen my understanding of the categories and themes that emerged (see Table 19). For this study, I term the categories Critical Levers that increase trust and coherence. These Critical Levers are the drivers for the two Themes of the study, Trust and Coherence. I explore the data from all cycle activities in the Findings section.

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Table 19

*Frequency: All Activities*

| Themes | Critical Levers | Learning Exchanges | 1:1 Interviews | Reflective Memos | Personal Narrative | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trust | | | | | | |
| | Proximity | 17 | 22 | 18 | 8 | 65 |
| | Support | 28 | 33 | 32 | 6 | 99 |
| | Vulnerability | 7 | 0 | 23 | 5 | 35 |
| Coherence | | | | | | |
| | Vision | 16 | 15 | 17 | 1 | 49 |
| | Alignment | 13 | 12 | 18 | 3 | 46 |
| | Systems | 10 | 26 | 20 | 3 | 59 |

## Findings

This study's Focus of Practice (FOP) is on how school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust. The constructs of trust and coherence sit squarely in this study's research questions and design. Analyzing the data from all study activities (see Table 19), I verified that trust and coherence are paramount considerations when leaders build strong organizations. Figure 11 represents the two main themes of trust and coherence and the six Critical Levers that increase these themes.

More specifically, through the study's activities and data analysis, the CPR group found three Critical Levers for increasing trust: Proximity, Vulnerability, and Support, and three Critical Levers for increasing coherence: Vision, Alignment, and Systems. From the beginning, some of the codes and categories were blurry on the edges. I followed the Saldaña (2016) model of moving from codes to categories to themes, some of which became Critical Levers in my work. Saldaña (2016) outlines the necessity of having a systematic framing of the work to ensure the validity of the coding process, but "… that the actual act of reaching theory is much more complex …" (p. 14). While engaged in systematically and iteratively moving from codes to categories and themes, the surfaced codes and categories can look discrete. Figure 11 represents the gravitational influence of the broad themes of Trust and Coherence and the Six Critical Levers for increasing the themes. In the following subsections, I write the overall findings as discrete sections, when in reality, it is difficult to extricate the influence of one from the other.

### Building Trust: Depth Requires Time & Vulnerability

I designed this study to answer the research question: How do school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust between and among each other and foster innovation? By analyzing the data from the first two PAR cycles, we explored the theme of
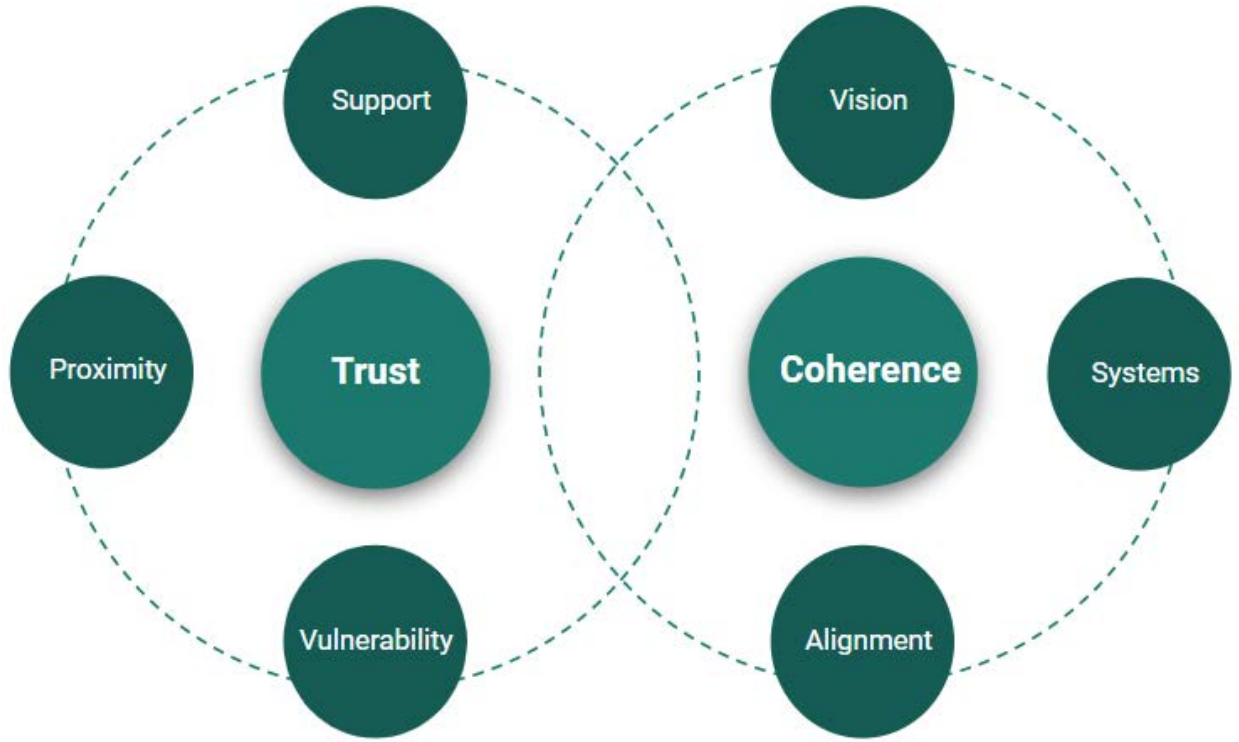
*Figure 11.* Six critical levers: Building trust and coherence.

Trust. We verified that trust is foundational for educators' engagement in school improvement initiatives. To validate and extend the findings related to trust, I designed a Personal Narrative to consider the Theme and three Critical Levers. During the August 01, 2022, Assessment Team Meeting, I collected data from the Personal Narrative. In the trust Critical Lever subsections, I explore the data from Cycle Two and synthesize the findings from all cycles of this study. I end the Trust section with a review of the trust data before moving on to the Coherence section.

*Proximity*

Proximity is the term I use for several codes, categories, and ultimately the Critical Lever that emerged throughout this study. Proximity encompasses codes related to how leaders can bring people together in a nurturing way and build trust. This increase in trust can improve the willingness to innovate and improve student outcomes. Proximity codes have had a high frequency and magnitude in this study's three coding and data analysis cycles (see Figure 12). Figure 12 is a chart with data from all three PAR cycles. The data is stacked to show each Critical Lever's total number of data points throughout the study. Support was the Critical Lever with the highest frequency with 89 occurrences, Proximity was next-highest with 65 occurrences, and Vulnerability had 35 occurrences. I explore the data in support of each Critical Lever in the following subsections.

During the Pre-Cycle, Commiserate emerged as a trust code with a low magnitude and Proximity with a medium magnitude. Initially, I felt that even though there was only a frequency of four occurrences and a low magnitude for Commiserate, it was a highly resonant code with participants and was an area for further exploration. Proximity arose with a frequency of nine occurrences, which seemed linked to the design of the activities. By analyzing the data, I
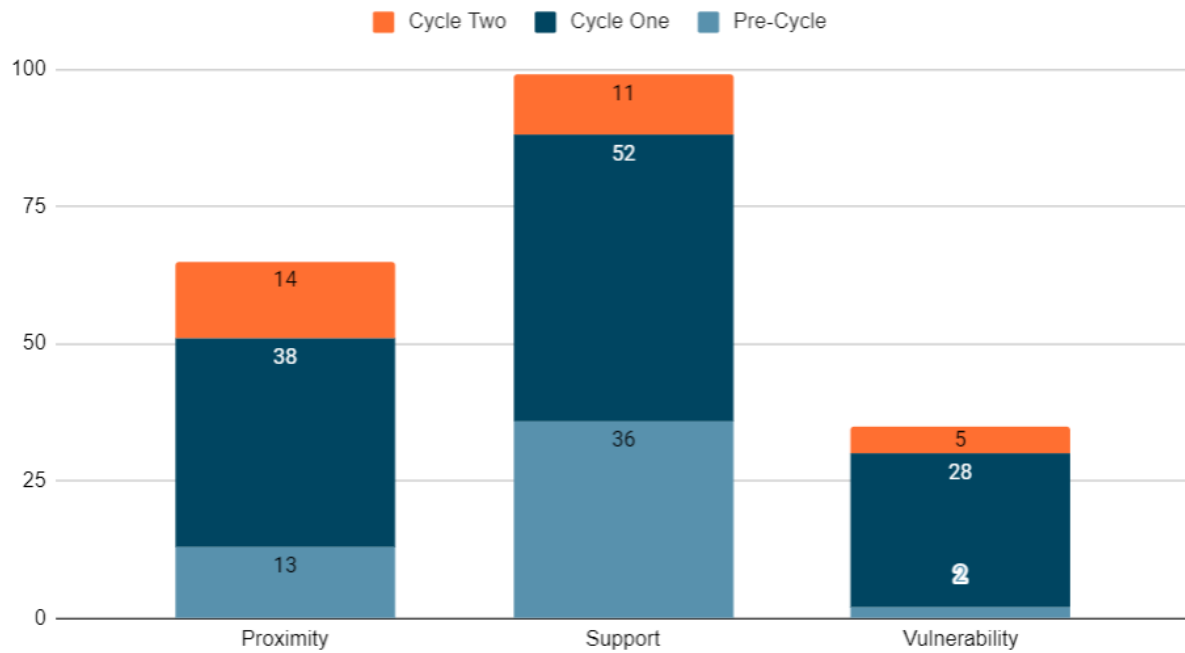
*Figure 12*. Trust: All PAR cycles frequency chart.

determined that Commiserate should collapse into Proximity. With more time and consideration, Proximity rose to the level of being a Critical Lever for increasing trust.

Through the analysis of Cycle One, Proximity and Commiserate continued to emerge with a relatively high frequency (see Tables 14, 15, & 16). As discussed in Chapter 5, it was here that I began to see the Six Critical levers that increase the themes of Trust and Coherence. This deeper understanding led me to collapse Commiserate and Communication into Proximity. By collapsing into Proximity, I could articulate how the data show that building nurturing collaborative spaces is an active set of practices that can lead to greater trust.

More specifically, Proximity is a set of practices that leaders can use to lead to greater feelings of being supported and a greater willingness to engage in vulnerable discussions and actions. Our use of Personal Narratives (PNs) was especially resonant with participants. An educator captured one example of the power of Proximity during the Cycle Two Personal Narrative. She articulated how coming together around activities such as the PN helped her see each participant more fully and lowered any feelings of ulterior motives. She saw this as building trust between the participants. By designing the PNs to bring leaders together to discuss their perspectives or experience with something aligned with the overall theme of the meeting, I created a nurturing space that led to increased feelings of trust. Any leader can attend to this need by moving away from icebreakers or other warm openers to initiating activities that truly honor each person's identity and lived experience.

Proximity is one of the most frequent and resonant codes, categories, and Critical Levers precisely because I have intentionally woven it into every aspect of this project. The data show that Proximity is a Critical Lever for leaders to pursue greater trust and coherence. M. Anders posted on Jamboard the quote I used to open the Trust section: "Depth requires time and

vulnerability" (MA LE, 8.04.22; see Appendix M). This statement captures the weight of the Proximity goals and implications. She was saying that we built trust by taking the time to come together and consciously build it. We facilitated greater depth of our work by attending to increasing trust and the willingness to be vulnerable.

### Support

The Support Critical Lever is more than material assistance; it is the perception of adequate backing from individuals or the organization. The data from this study indicate that leaders are more likely to trust the intentions of leaders they feel are supportive of their work. This gain in feeling supported increases trust and the willingness to engage in improvement efforts.

Support has been the highest frequency code, category, emergent theme, and Critical Lever throughout this study (see Figure 11). Support first arose as codes indicating a lack of support in the Pre-Cycle (see Figure 6). During the Pre-Cycle, Support had the second-highest frequency of the emerging categories (see Figure 12). The high frequency of the Support codes initially caused me to see Support as a theme, but my conception shifted through data analysis during PAR Cycle One.

Support continued to emerge with a high frequency during PAR Cycle One. I coded Support as one of three emerging themes with Trust and Coherence. As explained in Chapter 5, I realized upon further analysis of Cycle One data that there was more power in organizing the data as actionable. Many early codes were negative, such as the Churn caused by turnover at every level or the lack of feeling supported by the central office. These codes were essential and relevant, but through the analysis, I found that the power of my findings lay in the positive actions that leaders can take to counter or avoid these negative codes and build Trust and

Coherence. Support remained first as a category within the theme of Trust and then as a Critical Lever for building trust. As such, the Support finding is that this category is a Critical Lever for increasing trust. Trust and Coherence remained themes as they were the central ideas of the research questions.

By analyzing the data from Cycle Two, I further cement support as a critical lever for building trust. One participant of the Assessment Team Meeting put a note on the Jamboard that surfaced that she feels supported, "… when the reasons for the decisions are made clear. I may not agree with the decision, but I feel supported if I understand why another route was taken" (PN, 08.01.22). The study's district is relatively large, with over 1,500 certificated employees. This size means that leaders make many decisions that are not always the preferred route for every educator, and the reasoning behind these decisions can be opaque. When leaders do not clarify why they planned something contrary to the wishes of other educators, the decision can seem inconsistent.

Another facet of Support that emerged from the assessment meeting's Personal Narrative activity was that participants felt supported and had a greater degree of trust when brought together to receive an update on the latest decisions and what will be upcoming. Participants articulated that they often felt in the dark, and being surprised by changes in policy or last-minute requests to accomplish tasks makes them feel unsupported and diminishes trust in the organization (PN, 08.01.22). One example that arose during the meeting was one leader's practice of reading every Board of Education packet and watching every board meeting to know how her work would be impacted (PN, 08.01.22). This leader felt that the district goals affected her duties and often shifted without anyone personally telling her. Keeping track of the board meetings allowed her to stay on top of communication. I captured some of the thoughts of this

conversation on a sticky on the Jamboard that said, in part, "communicate big district ideas, changes, logistics." These are only fragments of the overall discussion. A data point from the Pre-Cycle supported these fragments when a central office administrator described how receptive sites were to his informal visits to have ad hoc conversations about the vision and intent of district-wide initiatives (LM ,1:1, 10.27.21).

Another example was when a site leader discussed the power of the leadership action of bringing people together when she said, "… not only do we need to share, but we also need to, just like, have the opportunity talk to each other and learn from each other" (SP, 1:1, 11.5.21). The data showed an intensity of feeling when leaders felt unsupported. The analysis also showed how collaboration planned with CLE methodologies increased feelings of support. Support emerged first as a code and then a category that I collapsed into a Critical Lever that can increase trust.

*Vulnerability*

The research question guiding this study is: How do school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust between and among each other and foster innovation? Through analysis, I found Vulnerability to be a powerful indicator of leaders' willingness to engage in innovation. For this study, I use the word vulnerability to mean the act of risking detrimental outcomes such as poor student performance, professional embarrassment, judgment, or formal criticism (Tschannen-Moran and Gareis, 2018). Data showed that leaders should attend to increasing the willingness of leaders to engage in vulnerable interactions. These interactions have a reciprocal relationship with trust. Leaders were more willing to be vulnerable when trust was higher, and leaders allowing themselves to be vulnerable built trust between and among leaders.

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Vulnerability was a vital consideration of this study before data collection began. As I designed the study to answer how central office leaders build trust and coherence between and among school leaders, I needed to ensure that I had a firm conception of what I meant by trust. In the literature review, I used the work of Tschannen-Moran as a frame for that understanding. Although vulnerability was not one of the Five Facets, she uses the idea to describe Benevolence. She argues that Benevolence is the belief that you can trust someone to have your best interest in mind and therefore allow yourself to be vulnerable (Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). In addition, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2018) define vulnerability as the act of risking detrimental outcomes such as poor student performance, professional embarrassment, judgment, or formal criticism.

Vulnerability emerged at a low frequency in the Pre-Cycle with a frequency of only four occurrences. It remained central in my thinking due to the resonance of how it arose. In the Pre-Cycle, B. Jackson paused the meeting to say that she would be vulnerable before speaking about her anxiety around her job (BJ LE., 10.19.21). Her naming of an intentional choice to allow herself to be vulnerable led me to see other instances of leaders becoming more vulnerable with their feelings and interactions in the LEs. In Cycle One, the code Vulnerability had a medium magnitude with a frequency of seven. These seven instances were from the two Learning Exchanges, not the 1:1 Interviews. Although not explicitly stated, there were moments of Vulnerability woven through the 1:1 Interviews (GC R.Memo, 10.21.21). The act of entering into that space and engaging in deep conversations about education is an act of Vulnerability. This Vulnerability was possible because of our work to build trust and make leaders feel supported.

During PAR Cycle Two analysis, I validated Vulnerability as a Critical Lever for increasing trust. The leaders felt that bringing people together could increase educators' willingness to be vulnerable and collaborate on a project or problem. One member brought up some recent Problem of Practice protocols from district work as helpful. She said the practice helped her "… feel like the people in the space are all working toward the same purpose" (PN, 08.01.22). Another participant surfaced that this made for a lessening of feeling like there were "ulterior motives" (PN, 08.01.22). These ideas were part of the conversation about how deepening trust leads to a greater willingness to engage in vulnerable discussions and actions.

One thread that emerged throughout the study and again from this data set was the idea of the importance of modeling Vulnerability. When a leader enters a space with a vulnerable stance, others are more likely to be willing to allow themselves to be Vulnerable in public. The group felt that this modeling increases the willingness of others to act in a vulnerable fashion and is a lever for building trust. District meetings often focus on 'best practices,' with central office administrators asking site leaders to present something they are doing well. This practice can be helpful but offers a series of success stories that push leaders away from feeling comfortable allowing themselves to be Vulnerable. One educator in the assessment meeting used Problem of Practice protocols as an example when she said that leaders engaged in this practice entered the room, admitting they were struggling with an issue (PN, 08.01.22). For her, this admission of struggle was a choice to enter a vulnerable stance and a decisive action for leading others to a higher willingness to be Vulnerable and engage in vulnerable activities.

### Trust Findings Summary

The interrelated nature of the Critical Levers for increasing trust continued to emerge in Cycle Two. One of the first pieces of data that emerged from the PN was when one participant

placed a virtual sticky note on the Jamboard that read: "As much as I hate meetings, we need to build ourselves as a team" (PN 0,8.01.22). This educator is a 30-year veteran who often leans toward a negative framing of experiences. She is also one of the first to jump in to solve problems and engage with others to find those solutions. Her comment about a desire to meet indicates that while educators may have negative feelings about formal meetings, there is a thirst for authentic connection in their professional life. As the conversation continued, there were thoughts and comments that I may have coded earlier in the project as distinctly Commiserate or Proximity or later as Support or Vulnerability. In reality, they are really about all of these. Many of the emerging thoughts could be coded simultaneously in different themes and levers. During my analysis, I stopped writing and tried to capture the interrelated nature of the Critical Levers' effect on building trust through drawing. I was hoping the non-static nature of doodling might help me better understand how to build trust. I adapted some of my original pictures to the conceptual frame in Figure 13.

I created Figure 13 to capture the nature of the Trust findings in this study. Proximity is a set of practices that leaders can use to create greater feelings of Support. I articulate these practices in Chapter 7. The bucket represents these feelings of Support. As leaders more strongly feel Support, Trust rises. As Trust increases, educators are more willing to allow themselves to engage in vulnerable conversations or actions. This frame is representative rather than literal. The data does not conclude the exact point of feeling supported and, therefore, willing to be Vulnerable. The findings highlight the adverse effects of feeling a lack of Support and the buoying effects of feeling supported.
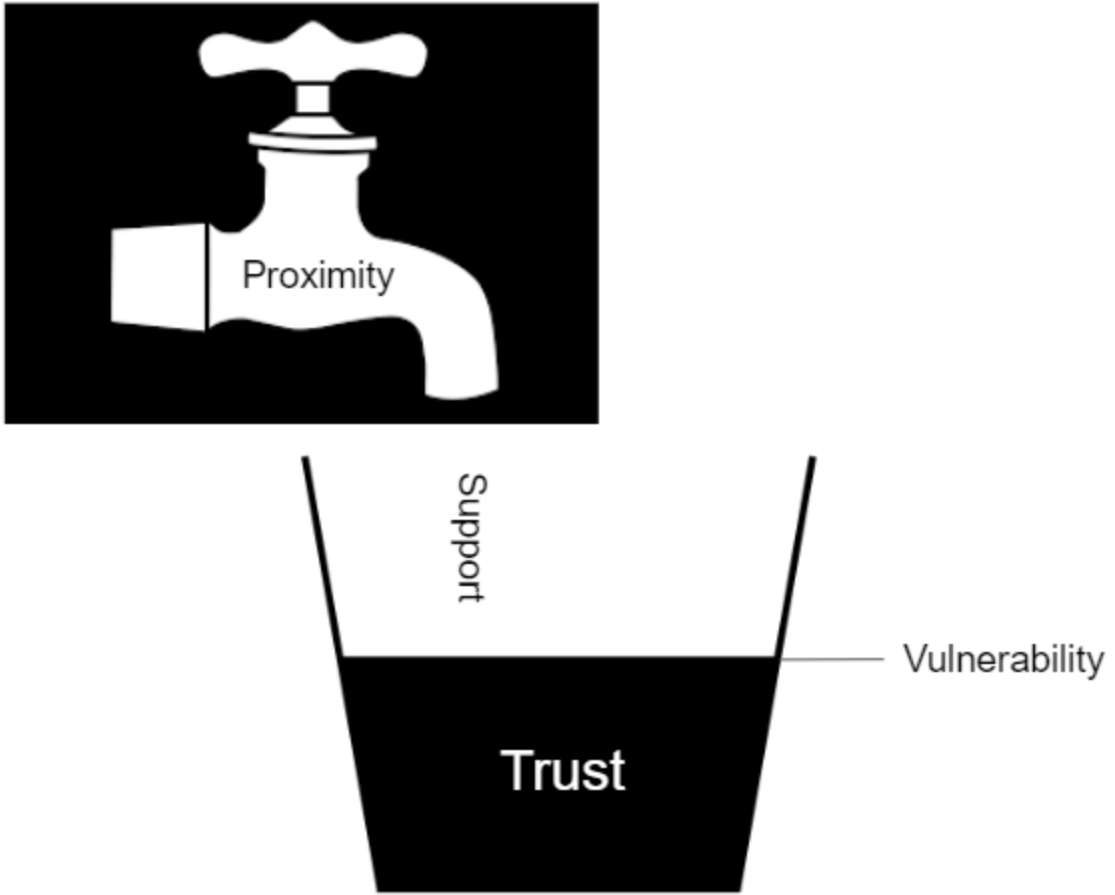
*Figure 13.* Building trust: Three critical levers.

**Building Coherence: There Is Often No Narrative but My Own**

The main research question guiding the study design is: How do school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust between and among each other and foster innovation? Coherence is a crucial consideration in all phases of the study. As part of my initial planning process, I used the definition from the Internal Coherence Framework as the frame for how I understood coherence. The authors define coherence as the collective capability of the adults in a school building or an educational system to connect and align resources to carry out improvement strategies (Forman et al., 2018).

Through analysis of the data produced from the PAR study activities, I found that Vision, Alignment, and Systems are three Critical Levers for increasing coherence in school districts and other organizations. These three levers emerged as medium- or high-frequency codes in the PAR Pre-Cycle and Cycle One (see Figure 14). Figure 14 is a chart with data from all three PAR cycles. The data is stacked to show each Critical Lever's total number of data points throughout the study. Systems was the Coherence Critical Lever with the highest frequency with 59 occurrences, Alignment was next-highest with 57 occurrences, and Vison had 49 occurrences. As I progressed with data analysis and the collapsing of codes into more significant categories and themes, it became clear that these three ideas were essential to participants. I facilitated a Learning Exchange (LE) on August 04, 2022, to consider the three Critical Levers for increasing coherence. During this LE, participants validated Vision, Alignment, and Systems as crucial for building greater organizational coherence. In the following subsections, I explore the data from Cycle Two and synthesize the findings from all cycles of this study. I end the Coherence section with a review of the data before concluding Chapter 6.

*Vision*

Initially, the Vision codes emerged regarding curriculum. As I chose to focus on working with schools implementing the same alternative math curriculum, this was not surprising. Through iterations of analysis, I gleaned that it was the existence of the well-thought-out Vision itself, and not necessarily the nature of the Vision, that was paramount. To be clear, this is not to discount the value of aligned solid curricula but to focus on another aspect of Vision. Leaders who were clear about what they were focusing on had a strong reason why they could articulate to all levels of their community and were more likely to create a coherent school improvement plan. One principal said:

> Of course, I want the autonomy to keep doing what I am doing but have no interest in telling others what they should do. We have been successful because we chose what works best for our community and built everything around that vision. (AJ LE, 10.19.21)

During PAR Cycle One, Vision appeared in the data at a medium or high frequency (see Figure 14, Appendix J). The context was still often related to curricula. As with the Pre-Cycle, the data point remains the nature of the study examining schools focusing on an alternative curriculum. One clarifying example is when a school leader talked about how her principal aligned the school around a vision for school improvement in the form of adopting and implementing a new math and ELA curriculum. She discussed how this process led to greater coherence within the school and combatted the churn of high turnover (PR, 1:1, 11.17.21). Several leaders were involved in the work, but she specifically highlighted the clear vision of improvement promoted by the principal. She felt that his enduring vision for improvement helped those other leaders excel. She said the principal makes the educators at his school "… feel connected … because there's just not enough in this work. … Like, what else is there besides

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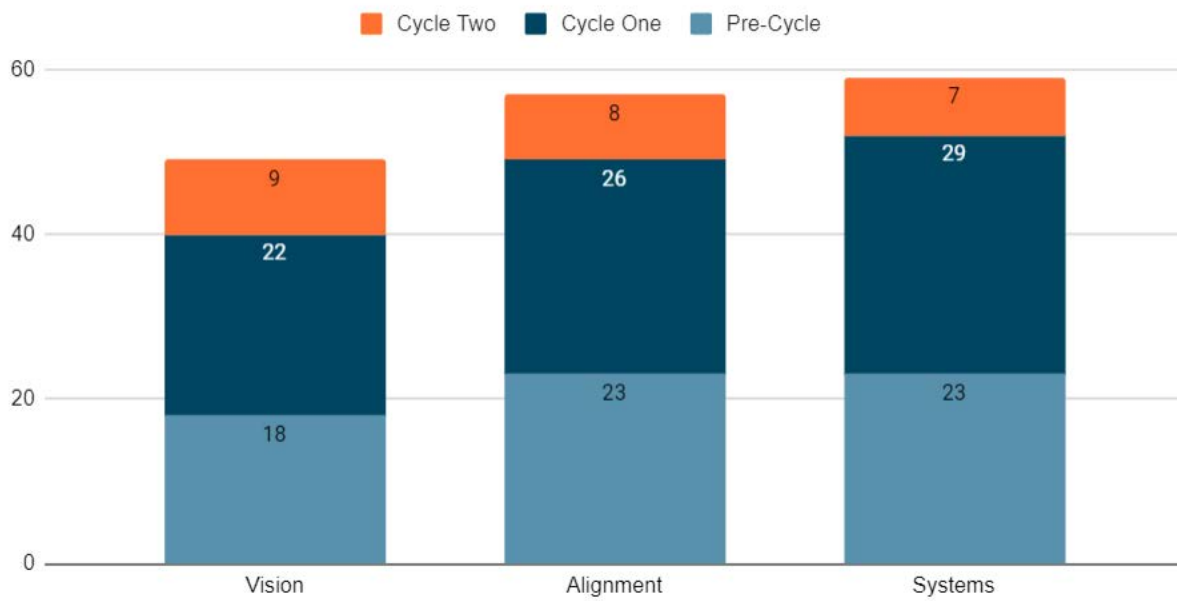
*Figure 14*. Coherence: All PAR cycles frequency chart.

being deeply connected to your purpose and your people? To keep you here because it's certainly not going to be the salary." This comment followed her exploring how hard leading during COVID-19 was for her and the principal. She felt that the principal's clear vision lowered anxiety and increased the coherence of the school. Vision emerged with eight occurrences during the PAR Cycle Two Learning Exchange on August 04, 2022 (see Table 20). I began this section with the title, "There is often no narrative but my own," because this statement by W. Charles captures the importance of district leaders communicating a clear vision (WC LE, 08.04.22). W. Charles has been one of the most consistent participants of this study and was one of three educators in this LE, including M. Anders and myself. With this statement, W. Charles articulated that she is often in a position of having to create a vision for her work because she usually does not see that district leadership has a vision for how initiatives improve site work or student outcomes. She continued by saying that district leaders need to take the time to explain why we are choosing certain focal areas.

Analysis of the PAR Cycle Two Learning Exchange validated the findings of earlier cycles that Vision is a Critical Lever for increasing coherence (see Figure 14). These codes were primarily positive about how a clear leadership Vision leads to greater coherence, with a frequency of four. One thought I coded in this area was stated by W. Charles when she said, "[Setting a vision] is what we have to get done in August … for the kids and community" (WC LE, 08.04.22). W. Charles highlighted the value of leaders having a clear vision and goals articulated in August to set the course for the district. The fifth occurrence was the negative statement I previously explained.

Table 20

*August 04, 2022 Learning Exchange Coherence Categories and Codes*

| Critical Lever | Code | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Vision | Value of | 5 |
| Vision | Status Quo | 3 |
| Alignment | Symmetry | 3 |
| Alignment | Walkthrough | 2 |
| Systems | Status Quo | 4 |
| Proximity | Identity | 4 |
| Proximity | Time | 2 |
| Support | Validation | 3 |
| Support | Intent | 2 |

Codes related to Vision arose in all cycles (see Figure 14) and activities (see Table 20) of this study. The data show that the Vision Critical Lever extends to many of the functions of the school district. One leader discussed how she does not need to agree with decisions from the district. She described how if the vision and reasoning for a change are clear, she feels better about aligning her work to the directive. As such, leaders who wish to increase coherence must create a strong vision and communicate why this vision is essential along with the improvement plan. By doing so, leaders can tailor strategies to the specific needs of the loose coupling of schools in a large public district (Elmore, 2004; Weick, 1996).

*Alignment*

Alignment codes were some of the highest frequency and magnitude codes from the beginning of data collection (see Figure 14). As with the Vision codes, these codes were initially highly focused on curriculum, as the leaders of the three schools involved were eager to talk about how they left a conference invigorated with a vision they wanted to implement. During the Pre-Cycle Learning Exchange, participants discussed how upon returning from the conference, their first step was to communicate their learning to teacher leaders and engage them in aligning understanding of the need for changing curricula. By doing so, they could align educators' understanding of the goals of implementing the alternative curriculum and build greater coherence across the school (LE, 10.19.21).

I captured one compelling example of leaders exploring the nature of alignment during Cycle One when M. Anders said:

This cohesion is built around something deeper than just curriculum. It's around beliefs and practices, and we haven't spent that deep learning time as a district to get to really

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dig into what is good practice. What does it look like? And then who are we as a district?

(MA LE, 02.08.22)

This phrase was one small part of a broader conversation between M. Anders and A. Jones, who are two leaders with two very different philosophies of school improvement. As I reflected on this exchange, I understood they were talking about two aspects of Alignment. Alignment is an essential concept that captures both the work to get people doing the work in a similar manner and how we understand the value of context-driven differences aiming for the same vision of student improvement (GC RMemo, 02.08.22).

During the August 04, 2022, Learning Exchange, two Alignment codes emerged with a frequency of two or greater, Walkthrough and Symmetry (see Table 20). One particularly illustrative example of an Alignment code during the Cycle Two LE arose when W. Charles used a metaphor to talk through the nature of coherence. She explained that a championship team has all the players performing an extraordinary job. W. Charles said there is Alignment and excitement around the whole building when we are all working together. I coded this as the Alignment code Symmetry, as she was talking about the Alignment of different levels of the organization. Her point was that she often does not see alignment and that the district benefits from leaders aligning actions with a strong vision (WC LE, 08.04.22).

Throughout this PAR study and illustrated above, Alignment has emerged as integral to building coherence. Educators are more likely to achieve the goals of a school or district when those goals are understood similarly across the organization. A vital aspect of the findings of this study is that alignment does not mean everyone is doing the same thing. Each subdivision of the district, student, class, school, community, etc., has its context, and educators benefit from flexibility within that context. This is especially true if the vision is clear, and educators across

the system have aligned to the same goals for student achievement. Therefore, a well-understood vision facilitates greater alignment.

*Systems*

Systems emerged throughout the study, beginning in the Pre-Cycle with a medium magnitude (see Figure 14). Upon reflection and recoding, I collapsed some other codes into Systems, most notably Curriculum, because I coded the systems built to support curriculum implementation. The topic of every conversation was related to the performance of alternative curricula, so the codes were more meaningful as a Systems code. This recoding made Systems the highest-frequency code during the Pre-Cycle (see Appendix J). This trend continued throughout the study, validating Systems as a Critical Lever for increasing coherence (see Figure 14).

I designed the August 04, 2022 Learning Exchange to explore the Critical Levers for increasing coherence. The data validated leaders' feeling that Systems is a Critical Lever. One example of the emergence of an idea I simultaneously coded into Systems and Vision was from W. Charles. During the LE, she put a virtual sticky on the Jamboard that said, "You move out of the status quo by identifying the problem, planning how to get out, and being brave and focused enough to do it" (WC LE, 08.04.22). During our discussion, she expanded on this quote to explore her perception that a leader who aligns the systems to a strong vision can increase the coherence necessary to create successful change initiatives.

In Cycle One, I coded Systems as a category in the Coherence theme. When I realized that I was uncovering a set of practices for increasing coherence in an educational organization, I began to call Systems a Critical Lever. Systems emerged as a code I termed Curriculum before analyzing further and understanding the participants' meaning as to how the curriculum is

chosen and implemented as a system that leaders can leverage to increase coherence. Systems also arose as a counter to Churn, which is the turmoil caused by teacher and leader turnover. P. Rawlins spoke of this in our 1:1 when she brought up the example of how the systems building by A. Jones made teachers feel less anxiety and therefore opt to remain at the school (PR, 1:1, 11.17.21).

Systems is the Coherence code that emerged at the highest frequency throughout the study (see Figure 14). The ongoing work of the leadership team of MES to build systems of support aligned with the vision of improvement through the implementation of the new curricula arose repeatedly during the study. One specific example was how the leadership team ensured their availability to cover the ELA block. Part of their vision was that students "walk to read" in a leveling system to focus on areas of need. This strategy exemplifies leaders accomplishing school achievement initiatives by building systems around a strong vision. The high frequency is also due to the interrelated nature of the Coherence codes that I explore in the following subsection.

### *Coherence Findings Summary*

As with the levers for the Trust theme, the Coherence levers overlap and are interrelated. Through the three cycles of collecting and analyzing data, Vision, Alignment, and Systems emerged first as codes, then categories, and finally as the three Critical Levers for increasing trust. Through the iterations of analyzing codes and collapsing them into more significant concepts, I have explored these Critical Levers as distinct influences on Coherence. In some ways, they are, but it may be more illustrative to view the Critical Levers as interrelated and often sequential.

P. Rawlins articulated the overlap in the Pre-Cycle when she spoke about how A. James, the principal of MES, was leading through the difficulty of running a school during COVID-19. P. Rawlins brought up how the principal had a solid instructional vision and aligned the school's collaboration and resources around that vision, which helped teachers develop a shared understanding of everyday actions and reduce overall anxiety. Another way to say this is that A. James' actions increased coherence at MES. Figure 15 illustrates the interrelated nature of the three Critical Levers that increase coherence. The graphic intends to capture that the three Critical Levers come together to create the whole of Coherence. I also chose the pyramid to indicate a hierarchical relationship. The findings of this study suggest that leaders will benefit from creating and communicating a vision for school improvement and then aligning existing or building systems that align with that vision.

An example of the powerful and related nature of the three Critical Levers for increasing coherence happened during PAR Cycle Two. Participants found one practice that facilitates alignment particularly important: leaders' walkthrough practices. There was a robust conversation about how walkthroughs are a powerful alignment tool because they can socialize school and district priorities. The walkthrough codes emerged when W. Charles and M. Anders began to dig into walkthroughs as a way of aligning one's vision into practices in the classroom and thereby increasing coherence. This part of the LE began with M. Anders asking if we were talking about being in lockstep with everybody doing the same thing or more aligned with "Fullan, who says that Alignment is about Vision and not the same practices across the system" (MA LE, 08.04.22; Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

I struggled to assign the thoughts and assertions that form this conversation into discrete codes during analysis. As Saldaña (2016) suggests, I simultaneously coded some of them, which

Vision
The creation and articulation of goals to the school community

Alignment
Actions taken to make practices and implementation intentionally support intended goals and outcomes

Systems
Structures put in place to support the implementation of organizational goals
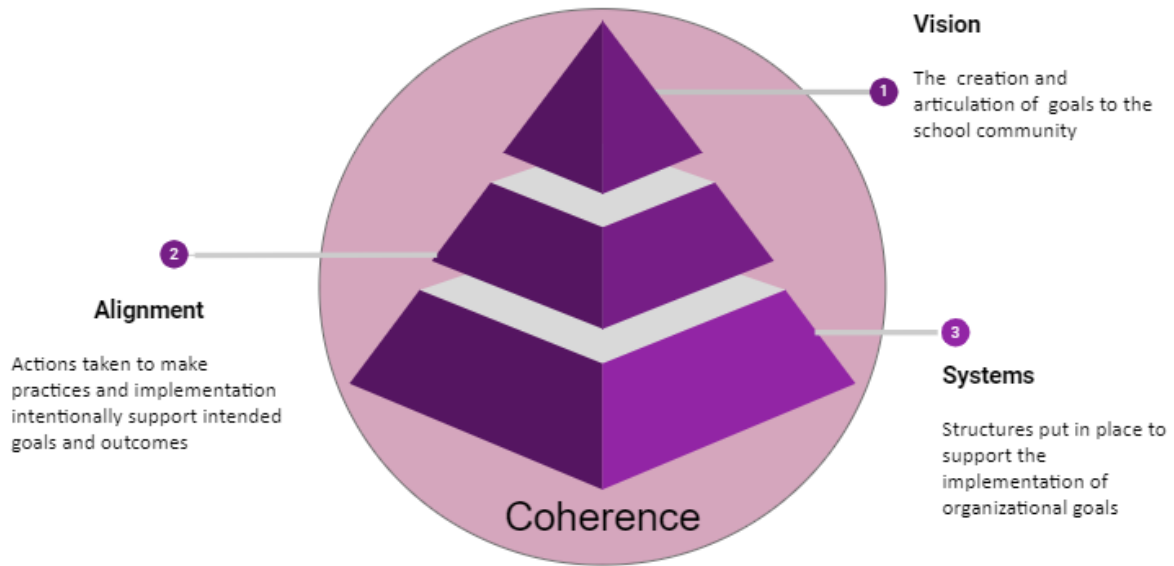
Coherence

*Figure 15*. Understanding the critical levers for increasing coherence.

helped me make sense of the data. The difficulty arose from the nature of walkthroughs. Walkthroughs are most effective when designed with content and systems aligned to the overall vision of school improvement. I created the Learning Exchange to gather more data and validate emerging findings from the first two PAR cycles, which it did. The leaders' conversation about walkthroughs highlights the importance of the three Critical Levers for increasing trust. This data set also supports the title of this dissertation in that when leaders use a solid vision for Align Systems around clear goals for school improvement, that improvement can be '*Greater than the Sum*' of the constituent actions that make it up.

## Conclusion

The Focus of Practice of this study is how school leaders and central office administrators build trust and coherence. I began this study with a planning cycle built around a Learning Exchange exploring the assets and challenges of one of the focal schools. Then, the Co-Practitioner Researchers and I engaged in three cycles designed using Community Learning Exchange and improvement science methodologies. The planning cycle took place in Fall 2020, the Pre-Cycle in Fall 2021, Cycle One in Spring 2022, and Cycle Two in Fall 2022.

I designed each of these Participatory Action Research (PAR) cycles to bring leaders into activities that produce data that answer the research question: How do school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust between and among each other and foster innovation? The answers to that question are multileveled and interrelated. Through exploring the data, I found that mistrust and fragmentation are powerful opposing forces within an educational organization. I also found that leaders can take specific actions to increase trust and coherence. Those actions are the six Critical Levers for building trust and coherence. As leaders think through how to improve the outcomes of their community through planning and

implementing plans and actions, considering how to use Proximity and Support to increase

educators' willingness to engage in Vulnerable conversations and efforts should be centered.

Similarly, leaders should develop a strong Vision and Align Systems around that vision

to increase coherence and combat the fragmentation that is often a result of the Churn of turnover

of educators throughout the organization. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I summarize

this study and my growth as a leader. I then discuss the findings and offer implications for

practice, policy, and research.

# CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

I decided on the Focus of Practice for this study when I led a meeting where central office administrators rolled out a compliance system built around the existing implementation of alternative curricula. I had just started as a central office administrator, and this was one of my first meetings. Leaders wanted the meeting to increase coherence by overlaying this compliance system on work already in action. Site leaders felt this system devalued their work and was a needless barrier to their school improvement plans. I left the meeting feeling similarly. I felt that I led a discussion that lessened the trust of the site leaders in me as an individual and a representative of the central office. In the pursuit of greater coherence, we had decreased trust. We created a rift between the work of the school leaders and the central office administrators, which also reduced coherence and frayed trust between and among the two groups of administrators.

The Focus of Practice (FOP) of this Participatory Action Research (PAR) project is how school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust between and among each other. In the case of the curricular flexibility meeting, the site leaders decided to implement an alternative curriculum in response to internal needs assessments about how to best support their community. Each school in the forum was in different stages of implementation, but all had put in many hours of work creating internal alignment around their chosen curriculum. I began thinking about how trust and coherence are built and lost, and I also wanted to understand how these conditions may foster innovation.

Before planning this study, I engaged the leadership team of one of the schools in a Learning Exchange (LE). We engaged in activities designed to examine root causes at the macro, meso, and micro levels. I further explore the activities and data in the Analysis of Assets and

Challenges section of Chapter 1 (see Figure 1). By analyzing the data from the LE, I deepened my understanding of leaders' experience of trust and coherence in the district. I designed this study to further that understanding. At the macro level, leaders surfaced the difficulty of leading during COVID-19 and the inconsistent financial assistance as essential factors. At the meso level, leaders focused on the churn caused by teacher turnover and how the district did not have systems that supported teacher retention. This churn and adopting what they believed was a poor curriculum meant that instruction suffered. Our exploration of the micro-level assets and challenges made it clear that these educators had great pride in their school work. They drilled down on how if the district supported them and did not get in the way of their work, they built trust and coherence and engaged in innovative school improvement procedures.

I used the root cause analysis to design this study to explore further how central office administrators and school leaders can build trust and coherence and foster innovation. I chose three schools in different stages of implementing Illustrative Mathematics as their alternative math curriculum. I designed this study to bring the leaders of three schools and central office administrators together to co-create asset-based support systems between and among site leaders and central office administrators. By focusing our work on increasing local action space in adopting and implementing an alternative curriculum, we were able to tease out how leaders can build trust and coherence between and among school leaders.

I designed this study using the qualitative Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodologies. The study consists of four cycles of inquiry designed using the improvement science Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) framework (see Table 21). Each cycle consisted of at least one Learning Exchange designed using the Community Learning Exchange methodologies to

Table 21

*Study Cycles, Timeframe, & Activities*

| Research Cycle | Timeframe | Activities |
|---|---|---|
| Planning Cycle | Fall 2020 | Learning Exchange to Surface Assets and Challenges<br>Reflective Memos |
| PAR Pre-Cycle | Fall 2021 | Learning Exchange to Map Existing Curricular Structures<br>1:1 Interviews<br>Reflective Memos |
| PAR Cycle One | Spring 2022 | Learning Exchange to Build District Template<br>Learning Exchange to Build System for Judging the Efficacy of Alternative Curriculum<br>1:1 Interviews<br>Reflective Memos |
| PAR Cycle Two | Fall 2022 | Personal Narrative on Building Trust<br>Learning Exchange on Building Coherence |

create nurturing collaborative spaces centered on the co-practitioner researchers' experiences (Guajardo et al., 2016). In each cycle, we engaged in activities designed to gather and analyze data to answer my research question: How do school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust between and among each other and foster innovation?

I continue Chapter 7, the final chapter of this dissertation, with the Discussion section, where I revisit the study findings through the lenses of the empirical and theoretical literature using the frame of the two main themes of this study, Trust and Coherence. I then explore the implications of this PAR project and how the study contributes in large and small ways to practice, policy, and research. I then discuss how I have grown as a leader through engaging in the development and implementation of this study. Lastly, I end this dissertation with the Conclusion.

## Discussion

I walked away from the meeting in August 2020 with questions about trust and coherence and how I, as a new central office administrator, could improve the conditions for school leaders across a district to engage in innovations that will enhance student outcomes. Over the next year, I developed my research questions, read related research, and planned the study. I began the study with the Pre-Cycle in Fall 2021 (see Table 21) and concluded with PAR Cycle Two in Fall 2022. I designed each cycle around at least one Learning Exchange, 1:1 interviews, and reflective memoing. I primarily used two frameworks in the study design, improvement science and Community Learning Exchanges.

Improvement science is a framework for addressing specific issues. The fishbone exercise I used during planning and exploration in Chapter 1 (see Figure 1) to uncover the assets and challenges related to trust and coherence is an example of an improvement science tool I

adapted from the work of Bryk et al. (2015). The core lesson from the improvement sciences is that organizational inefficiencies do not stem from an absence of research or an inferior workforce. Instead, outcomes are the result of systems design. One primary method of inquiry in improvement science is the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle. I designed the PAR cycles using the PDSA frame.

The Community Learning Exchange (CLE) framework was central to my planning. The CLE framework is a methodology for bringing together diverse community members for a period of engaged, deep, collaborative learning. During a CLE, a group of people examine their everyday challenges and collective gifts and then freely share ideas for improvement that can change the system and each individual (Guajardo et al., 2016). My collaborations stem from the CLE methodologies but are on a smaller scale, so I chose to call them Learning Exchanges (LEs).

Analyzing the data from these three cycles of inquiry, I found six Critical Levers that increase trust and coherence. The three levers for increasing trust are Proximity, Support, and Vulnerability. The three levers for increasing coherence are Vision, Alignment, and Systems. In the next section, I further explore the findings of this study and how extant literature supports those findings.

## Findings and the Literature

In the Literature Review (Chapter 2) of this dissertation, I explored five areas of research or literature bins, building my understanding of the broader themes of Trust and Coherence. The Literature Bins are Coherent Leadership, Organizational Coherence and Change, School & Central Office Administrators Roles, Distributed Leadership, and Trust. I chose these five bins to

help me design this study to answer the research question: *How do central office and school administrators build trust and coherence between and among each other and foster innovation?*

Saldaña (2016) recommends labeling and analyzing portions of the data using broad themes as the organizing principle. For this study, I chose the more comprehensive schematic classification as the themes of Trust and Coherence. I used the term Critical Levers to collapse the categories into positive actions that leaders can take to increase trust and coherence. I use the broad themes of Trust and Coherence for the following sections to organize my discussion of the data and findings. I then reflect on each of the Critical Levers I found associated with that theme.

**Trust**

As part of the initial planning of this project, I researched existing literature on trust. The work of Tschannen-Moran was central to my bourgeoning understanding of trust and is still central to the design of this project (Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015, Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2018). I began with the five facets of trust as probable codes. While this was correct, none of the five facets of Benevolence, Reliability, Competence, Honesty, and Openness rose in the data of this study to the level of a Critical Lever. Still, these five facets were integral to my understanding of trust and helped me uncover the three Critical Levers for building trust: Proximity, Vulnerability, and Support.

The idea of Proximity appeared in the data during the Pre-Cycle. At that time, I saw only the code of how bringing people into proximity can be a factor in building trust. Another related code from the Pre-Cycle was Commiserate. The code name of Commiserate came directly from the words of a participant who articulated how good it felt to commiserate with participants who were experiencing similar issues (JB LE, 10.19.21). The Commiserate code originally meant

sympathizing with others and building empathy for another's experience. I collapsed the two and other related codes into the category of Proximity before seeing that what was emerging in the data were practices that leaders can engage in to increase trust.

I used the category and Critical Lever naming of Proximity to capture several promising practices. One such practice is Dynamic Mindfulness. I began each Learning Exchange with Dynamic Mindfulness (Niroga Institute, 2021) to help participants still their minds and enter the space calmly and ready to engage openly. Leaders can use the Community Learning Exchange methodology to create supportive spaces where people can come together as their whole selves.

One leader spoke about the harmful effects of the traditional central office meetings. He said he did not trust that leaders had his best interests in mind when they called principals together, which made him lose trust in both the organization and central office leaders (AJ LE, 02.08.22). Tschannen-Moran found that Benevolence was a facet of trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). This assertion by Tschannen-Moran supports the finding in this study that one aspect of Proximity is that when educators feel that leaders designed collaboration for their benefit, they feel more trust for the process and the leaders creating the space.

Another leader shared that "… not only do we need to share, but we also need to, just like, have the opportunity talk to each other and learn from each other" (SP, 1:1, 11.5.21). The data from this study shows that when central office leaders work to bring site leaders together to listen to their experiences and use that listening to change practices to align to need, trust between all participants increases. Research shows that a reliable leader focused on equitably holding the work leads to higher levels of collaboration and increased trust in the process (Bryk

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& Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

The Support Critical Lever for increasing trust is the amalgam of collapsed codes and categories from all phases of this study. Initially, I coded mentions of lack of support, the feeling of being supported by the central office, and how leaders often felt that barriers were either placed or removed by structural issues within the district. For the study, I collapsed these codes and categories into the Critical Lever for increasing trust. Leaders can intentionally increase trust by attending to building greater feelings of support in central office and school leaders. I explore the practices related to the Critical Levers more explicitly in the Implications section.

I designed this study around three schools that adopted an alternative math curriculum, so, unsurprisingly, one of the first Support codes to emerge was associated with curriculum support. Leaders felt that the central office-facilitated process had led to a substandard eight-year mathematic curriculum adoption (LE, 10.19.21; PS, 1:1, 11.5.21). This frustration lessened trust in the competency of central office decision-making. The data also showed that feelings of support could lead to increased trust and a willingness to engage in deeper educational conversations.

During the October 19, 2021, Learning Exchange (LE), a school leadership team voiced their frustration around district support. Later the same day, the principal and I engaged in a text thread. She followed up to ensure that I understood that her tone in the meeting was not meant to be negative but was actually due to her finally having a space to articulate her frustration. She then told me how much she appreciated the space and support. I coded this simultaneously as Proximity and Support. By triangulating this data in a reflective memo (01.28.22) with the data

from the LE and 1:1 interviews, I found that Support was both a positive and negative code that led me to see the category of Support as a Critical Lever for increasing trust.

Many of the Support codes that emerged from the data were specific to feelings about how central office administrators honored the time of site leaders. During the Pre-Cycle, a principal asked how the meetings at the heart of this study would benefit her. She then articulated how she did not feel leaders valued her expertise in many district meetings. This interaction highlighted the reciprocal nature of communication and how leaders can purposely bring leaders together to honor their perspectives, build support, and increase trust.

Research supports the idea that feelings of support are integral to high-functioning educational organizations. District leaders will benefit from building spaces where leaders feel empowered and supported. Research points to the efficacy of designing systems that provide leadership and support for site leaders. By designing systems that lead and support context-driven flexibility, leaders can increase feelings of support and trust across the organization (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Honig, 2006; Honig et al., 2010; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012; Leithwood et al., 1995).

Central office and site administrators will benefit from focusing on how supported all constituents feel. The findings of this study point to feelings of support being a key consideration in building trust. Feelings of support are felt differently at different levels of the organization. Those educators who see themselves as lower in the leadership hierarchy tend to be hyper-vigilant in their trust assessments of those higher in the organizational chart (Daly et al., 2015 Gray & Summers, 2016). Therefore, central office administrators who focus on listening to site leaders to support them more fully will also increase feelings of trust. This trust is a factor in asking educators to show the vulnerability necessary to enact school change (Bryk & Schneider,

2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

Research indicates that Vulnerability is a condition for willingness to innovate, as educators are more willing to experiment with new practices when levels of trust are higher (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Vulnerability arose in the Pre-Cycle when a site leader stated that she "was going to choose to be vulnerable" before diving into a conversation about her unfunded position for the following year (BJ LE, 03.22.22). Upon reviewing and triangulating data during later cycles of data analysis, I simultaneously coded this as Vulnerability and Support.

Creating conditions where educators are more willing to be vulnerable is integral to effective school improvement planning because there is a correlation between vulnerability and innovation (Daly et al., 2015; Schwabsky et al., 2020). One of the Five Facets of Trust put forth in the work of Tschannen-Moran is Benevolence, which is the assurance that the other will not exploit one's vulnerability. Trusting the benevolence of leadership leads educators to be more willing to expand their repertoire and try new things (Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

Another aspect of the text exchange with the leader I explored in the Support subsection was her bringing my willingness to be vulnerable and take a more collaborative listening approach to the fore. She felt that, especially with typically more top-down curricular matters, my vulnerable and inclusive stance made her more willing to engage on a deeper level. My job is partly to be the expert and last say on curricula. This principal and her leadership team felt that centering them as the experts created the conditions for them to engage in vulnerable conversations about the innovations on which they were working.

Honest conversations among educators can be vulnerable because there is a tacit admission of ignorance; therefore, educators are more willing to experiment with new practices when levels of trust are higher (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). In addition, there is a correlation between trust and innovation (Daly et al., 2015; Schwabsky et al., 2020). The data from this study reinforce existing research with leaders being willing to engage in more profound discourse when they feel more trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Daly et al., 2015; Schwabsky et al., 2020). We increased trust by bringing leaders together to build systems of support around a curricular implementation that was important to them. The increased trust resulted from more than the system we created together. By coming together to collaborate on complex educational issues, we made Proximity that raised trust and, therefore, the willingness to innovate (GC RMemo, 03.22.22).

Organizations often respond to a lack of trust by implementing rules and regulations as a substitute. These regulations may work for relatively simple tasks, but more complex tasks benefit from collaboration enhanced by trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Daly et al., 2015; Tschannen-Moran, 2001). This research aligns with my experience leading the meeting where central office administrators created compliance rules around adopting alternative curricula. This act showed a lack of trust, which the findings from this study show led to a reciprocal lack of trust from the site leaders toward the central office. The research of Daly et al. (2015) indicates that perceptions of trust are associated with forming negative relationships among leaders, and that these negative relationships weigh down the ability to implement innovative actions. In addition, a decrease in trust can lead to increased conflict and reduce the organization's ability to drive improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Leaders at every level will benefit from attending to trust as a foundation of school improvement.

**Coherence**

School improvement is hard work. The leaders in this study are deeply committed to improving student outcomes. In pursuing this desire, the leaders of the three schools at the heart of this study chose to adopt an alternative math curriculum, Illustrative Mathematics (IM). I chose these three schools expressly because they were engaged in implementing the same alternative curriculum, but this study is not about IM or any specific curriculum. The fact that these leaders chose to engage in local context-driven improvement plans and then had constraints placed on those plans by central office administrators intrigued me. Everyone in the curricular flexibility meeting that led me to the scope of the study was well-meaning and student-centered. Instead of seeing the opportunity to capture the passion of the site work and use their expertise to drive learning more broadly, central office leaders told site leaders to show what box they fit in, constraining innovation and lessening coherence.

Through analysis of the data over the three cycles of this study, I surfaced three Critical Levers for increasing coherence: Vision, Alignment, and Systems. One of the most frequent codes that emerged in the data was Churn, which is the dissonance created by the systemic issues that lead to turnover at all levels of educational organizations. Research supports the finding that systemic forces often pull educational organizations toward incoherence (Burch, 2007; Forman et al., 2018; Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Data from this study and research support that Churn is a draw toward fragmentation and away from organizational coherence.

Educational organizations are very complex institutions. Leaders often become frustrated when the if-then planning structures get bogged down in this complexity (Bolman & Deal, 2009; Weick, 1996). In this study, I find that there are clear actions and practices that leaders can take to increase coherence. By attending to the three Critical Levers of Vision, Alignment, and

Systems, leaders will increase coherence and improve their ability to land school improvement efforts.

Fullan and Quinn (2016) define coherence as "… the shared depth of understanding about the nature of the work" (p. 30). They say that to achieve this shared understanding, leaders must focus on the direction of the work to mobilize people. This shared understanding and direction is the power of Vision. Throughout this study, participants articulated that building a solid Vision can increase coherence and lessen dissonance within a complex system.

The leaders of the three schools involved in this study attended a conference where they came to see the adopted math curriculum as substandard. This perception led them to create a Vision of school improvement around adopting an alternative curriculum. Leaders used this Vision to create a common direction for all educators at the site to align their work. During the Pre-Cycle, a vice principal from one of the schools spoke about how the principal remained laser-focused on the Vision of implementing the Math and ELA adoption, which, in turn, kept educators at the school focused on an aligned improvement plan. She articulated how important this was to combat the loss of momentum that came with high teacher turnover. She also spoke about how it lowered anxiety overall to have a common goal and frame for collaborations at the site.

School leaders exert a significant, if indirect, effect on school effectiveness and student achievement. Research has shown that school leadership is "... second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning" (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 3). The power of site leadership is in the ability to set a vision and align the agenda of the school's work to that vision (Supovitz et al., 2010). This alignment around a strong vision also combats the drag toward returning to the status quo. During Cycle Two, one educator talked about how there is a

'gravity' toward what we know and how a strong vision can keep educators focused on the change away from the status quo (MA LE, 08.04.22). Existing research supports this finding that educational organizations normalize toward the status quo (Argyris, 2002; Daly et al., 2015; Weiss, 1995; Wong et al., 2020).

The main research question for this PAR study is: How do central office and school administrators build trust and coherence between and among each other and foster innovation? I designed this study to investigate the relationship between and among central office administrators and school leaders. The data points to the power of the Critical Lever of Vision in aligning the work in schools. In addition, data support the role of the central office in lessening dissonance by having a strong Vision and focusing on it. During Cycle Two, one leader spoke to this when she said that she often feels like she is setting her "own vision." She spoke to the need for central office leaders to articulate the vision scope clearly. Moreover, this straightforward improvement narrative to help leaders across the system should align their work to that vision (WC LE., 8.04.22).

The work of Meredith Honig highlights the power of the relationship between the central office and school leaders. Central office administrators push change by focusing on limited reform options, leading to better school decision-making. A central office Vision for school improvement increases the district's coherence and site leaders' ability to align around limited resources to support student improvement efforts (Honig et al., 2010; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012).

Both the findings of this study and the review of extant literature highlight the development of a strong Vision as essential to creating coherence in schools and districts. School leaders can use the Vision to keep site educators focused on the core priorities driving their

change initiatives. Symmetrically, central office leaders can use Vision to align the work of the sites between and among each other.

Vision and Alignment are inextricably intertwined. The Vision for school or district improvement is vital, but the actions and practices create the change. For the leaders involved in this study, Alignment was a key consideration; in this case, aligning their schools internally with how they implemented the new curriculum. The Vision was that their students would benefit from a higher-quality curriculum, and that practices needed to align with that Vision.

Research and the findings from this study clearly show that Alignment within a school and between different levels of an educational organization is essential. Honig highlights how changes in any system need to have aligned changes in policies and practices to be effective (Honig, 2006; Honig & Vankateswaran, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2020). I chose the leaders of three schools implementing the same alternative math curriculum, which led to much of the data emerging from the context of curricula. However, they extend beyond any specific curriculum. Data showed that participants believed their ability to socialize the Vision and align people's work around it led to greater coherence within the school.

I found it counterintuitive that leaders who made site-specific choices to shift to an alternative curriculum wished to have more central office involvement. The data from this study showed that leaders want greater alignment across the district, but only if this alignment is responsive to the work in which they were engaged. The initial curricular flexibility meeting and many other central office-led meetings felt like compliance to them. Leaders wanted central office administrators to facilitate school leaders coming together around a common framework and perhaps the same measurement tools. They also want these spaces to be safe for them to talk about what is working and not working. There is a thirst for authentic connection between and

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among the central office and schools, but the spaces where this is possible often feel less than supportive of the site work.

The leaders in this study were not unwilling to follow central office-led systems. At times, there was a desire to have the central office lead in setting a Vision and Aligning Systems to that Vision. This finding aligns with what Honig described as the need to intentionally and transparently orient central office support toward teaching and learning and create an effective feedback loop between central office administrators and site leaders (Honig et al., 2010; Honig & Rainey, 2020). Or, as Fullan and Quinn (2016) highlighted, many site leaders will say they want to be left alone when they are actually asking for the central office to be a help and not a hindrance.

The findings of wanting some alignment while still being driven by context-level needs mirror the work of Weick (1976). Weick asserted loose coupling to describe educational organizations through the complexity of the culture of each local context. Each school community in a district has its own culture and understands district-level initiatives through the lens of its particular context. The alignment meeting that gave birth to this study was a reaction to this loose coupling. Central office leaders were frustrated at the perception that there was no system guiding the implementation of alternative curricula, so they layered over a compliance system to bring the loosely coupled initiatives into greater alignment. Instead, the alignment meeting led to leaders working to mitigate what they saw as a system put into place for the benefit of the central office and not in alignment with their goals. What resulted was predictable, with the site leaders nominally aligning as told to do, but, in reality, relying on the loose coupling to continue with the change efforts they had begun.

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Churn was a negative code that first emerged in the November 18, 2020, Learning Exchange data examining the assets and challenges I held to help me design this study (see Appendix J). The term came from one of the participants describing the turbulence caused by the turnover of teachers and the associated loss of institutional knowledge. The code extended beyond that to the dissonance caused by turnover at all levels. Churn also captures the dissonance caused by any unaligned change in practices, whether related to a change in personnel or simply a decision made by a leader. As I analyzed and considered the emergent findings, I realized that the Churn findings were crucial to understanding how schools and districts undergo cycles of fragmentation. I also realized that the importance of this finding was in helping to identify how leaders can combat the negative drag of the Churn caused by turnover at all levels.

Because I began this study during COVID-19 and distance learning, this Churn seemed related to the global pandemic. While the particular circumstances certainly exacerbated the issues, they were not limited to that context. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) described how central office functions are interdependent and work together to maintain the status quo. In this case, the status quo is how the central office perpetuates inequitable teaching through a lack of support. One example from this study is how the district laid off all teachers with two or fewer years of experience. District leaders felt compelled to show a balanced budget by laying off these teachers even though it was clear that we were amid a teacher shortage. In addition, the schools engaged in this study had more teachers with few years of experience and therefore had to replace and train more teachers.

## Six Critical Levers: A Conceptual Framework

Figure 16 is a depiction of a framework for the findings of this study. The triangle on the bottom represents the status quo and the "gravity" that one participant described it as exerting (MA LE.08.04.22). The levers are the practices or activities that leaders can engage in to combat the status quo and increase trust and coherence. Although the levers emerged independently of each other, the data show that they are interrelated. One visual lever encompasses all three of the levers for each goal to indicate that the levers should be considered and implemented together.

Leaders can increase trust by bringing educators into Proximity. Through practices that reinforce Proximity, leaders can increase feelings of Support. By designing the gathering intentionally to attend to Proximity and Support, leaders increase educators' willingness to engage in Vulnerable activities. These three Critical Levers can increase overall Trust. Similarly, leaders can increase Coherence by creating and communicating a solid Vision and aligning systems (Alignment and Systems) to support that Vision. The findings of this study offer leaders a guide for increasing trust and coherence between and among school leaders and central office administrators.

I came to this representation of the six Critical Levers through iterative coding. I designed the study to investigate trust and coherence, which led to several negative codes where leaders felt a lack of or diminishing of trust or coherence. While these codes illustrated educator experience and helped me understand trust and coherence more fully, I was getting a static representation. During one meeting with my dissertation coach, she asked me, "What can leaders do about this?" With this as my guide, I analyzed the data and initial findings and found that what was emerging were practices that leaders can use to increase trust and coherence. At that point, I began to envision the categories as Critical Levers. As visualized in Figure 16, by

**Critical Levers:**
**Proximity, Support, & Vulnerability**
are practices leaders can implement to
increase trust.

**Critical Levers:**
**Vision, Alignment, & Systems**
are practices leaders can implement to
increase coherence.

Trust Levers

Coherence Levers

TRUST

COHERENCE

**STATUS QUO**
exerts a gravity toward existing systems that
perpetuate fragmentation & mistrust.
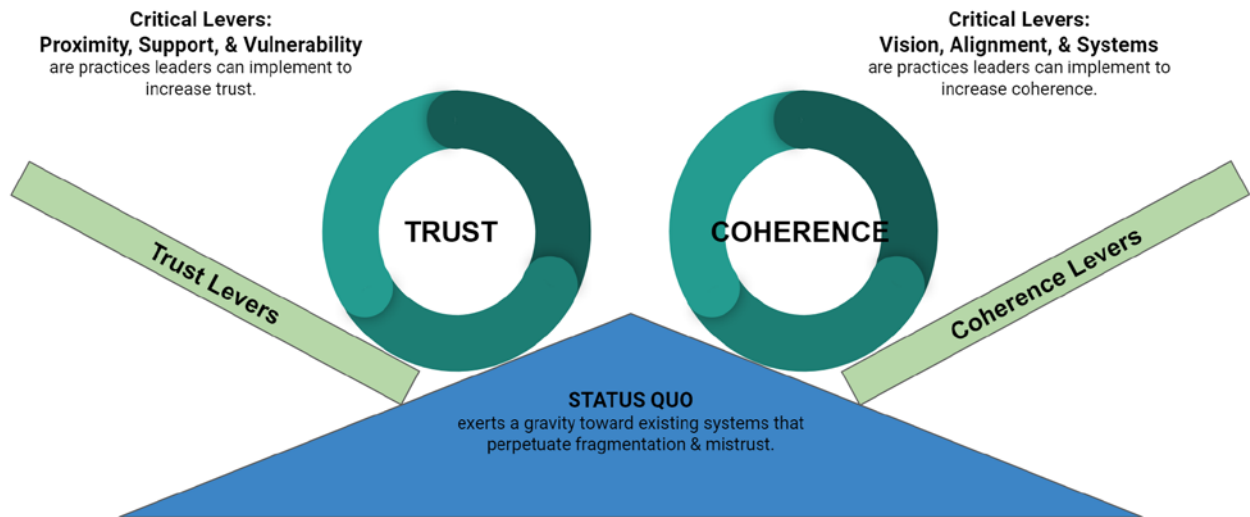
*Figure 16*. Framework for leadership actions.

utilizing these levers, leaders can combat the gravity of the status quo of traditional practices that perpetuate fragmentation and mistrust.

**Implications**

Trust and Coherence are fundamental implications to practice in successful educational organizations. The six Critical Levers are specific practices that leaders can focus on to increase those essential considerations. As I explored in the Discussion, there are systemic drags back to the status quo of inequitable practices and outcomes. Churn and mistrust are two of the most significant impediments to improving outcomes in our school. Leaders can combat this gravity by focusing on the practices found in this study.

Trust is foundational to a willingness to innovate. Many existing systems and practices undercut educators' trust in every level of public schools. Leaders can build the trust necessary to transform the system by focusing on Proximity, Support, and Vulnerability. Leaders at all levels can design collaborations to be nurturing and supportive of the needs of educators. Using the Community Learning Exchange methodologies, I built trust between and among school leaders and central office administrators. The practices I utilized are replicable and can change how educators experience their time together. Leaders can improve the conditions necessary for educators to engage in Vulnerable work by bringing educators into Proximity and ensuring they feel Supported.

Coherence at the classroom, school, and district levels is integral to high-functioning educational systems. To be clear, the research and the findings from this study do not indicate a high value with strict alignment. Although Alignment is a Critical Lever for increasing coherence, this was not all schools or classrooms engaging in the same practices, but in setting a solid Vision and aligning the systems to that Vision.

The three Coherence Levers are highly intertwined. Participants in this study found that a strong Vision with aligned systems (Alignment and Systems) can increase Coherence. These findings are replicable at any level of an educational organization. Leaders can improve coherence in schools by focusing on the three Critical Levers. The leaders at the three schools involved in this study focused their vision for school improvement on adopting a new curriculum they felt better supported their community. They then found success by aligning existing systems or creating new ones aligned with the vision. By engaging in these practices and communicating how they related to their community, they increased coherence within their schools. The study's data also found that the central office administrators who engaged in symmetrical practices at their level supported coherence between and among schools.

**Policy**

This study was born from a meeting where I was leading district leaders in explaining a policy of curricular flexibility to school leaders. My experience was that the meeting was counterproductive. I was a new central office administrator leading a process I did not yet understand. I saw a policy of compliance that lessened trust and coherence in the name of greater alignment. This policy exemplifies how districts and schools often overlay control systems to mitigate the issues that seem to be endemic in high-poverty urban schools. The findings of this study bolstered existing research and uncovered the six Critical Levers for increasing trust and coherence.

A policy of centering practices that increase trust would benefit any organization. Research and the findings from this study show a correlation between higher levels of trust and a willingness to innovate (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). School districts can increase trust in their organization by creating policies that

increase the nurturing meeting spaces. I term these practices Proximity in this study. One approach I am working on in my sphere of influence is shifting away from warm openers or icebreakers to a deeper entry into the collaborative space built around Personal Narratives (PNs). Not every meeting needs to begin with an official PN. Still, a policy designing every collaborative space to honor educators' and communities' identity, sense of place, and history will increase trust. The findings of this study show that this will build feelings of being supported, and these feelings of support increase the willingness to engage in Vulnerable work. The conclusions of this study and research indicate that coherence is integral to optimal function in educational organizations. The Critical Levers for increasing coherence can offer a framework for multiple policy levels. First, in creating new or maintaining existing policies, creating a solid Vision and Aligning Systems in support of the policy will improve the conditions for greater success. In addition, a policy of putting in the time and effort to align definitions of the district or school goals and socialize that understanding to all constituents will increase the likelihood of achieving the goals outlined in the Vision. Shared understanding also creates the conditions for educators at all levels to collaborate more effectively to develop Aligned Systems in support of the district or school.

Districts most often feel state policy through assessment and compliance measures. These measures are valid goals and can benefit when state and county leaders attend to increasing trust and coherence in their creation. Even within the compliance structure, leaders can have a policy of bringing district leaders together both to be instructed about the particular issue and listened to about the policy's effect. State and county meetings are a venue for modeling how educational leaders can build trust and coherence. Leaders at all levels can provide guardrails and make clear

the agency that individual districts, schools, and educators have within the compliance structures. The six Critical Levers will increase trust and coherence at all levels.

**Practice**

The first and most profound implication on practice that emerged from this study is that leaders can engage in practices that increase trust and coherence. The six Critical Levers that increase trust and coherence are operational practices. Study findings show that leaders planning engagement activities will benefit from intentionally considering the Critical Levers in their planning.

To build trust, leaders should design meetings that bring educators into Proximity. Dynamic Mindfulness, or other practices that still the mind and help educators enter the space ready to fully engage, help build trust. Ensuring that every collaboration begins with a Personal Narrative activity that allows them to bring their own identity to the work more fully deepens dialogue. These and other Proximity practices build feelings of Support. By designing spaces to increase feelings of support, trust increases between and among district leaders and educators. A specific trust finding was that leaders who model Vulnerability increase others' willingness to engage in vulnerable activities.

Study findings show that leaders who create and clearly communicate a strong Vision are more likely to get educators working in accord toward the same goals. The Alignment finding shows that coherence is further increased by aligning resources and Systems to the Vision. Leaders can build coherence by focusing on the three Coherence Critical Levers. Leaders should use these three Critical Levers to guide how they plan and implement change efforts. The Critical Levers can also act as a framework for reflecting on existing initiatives to help diagnose efficacy and iteratively improve.

**Research**

This PAR project contributes to the knowledge of how practitioners should collect and analyze data to make decisions and improve school and district decisions. The Community Learning Exchange (CLE) framework was central to the study's design and aligned with the research questions. I increased trust and coherence by bringing together leaders from different schools and levels of the district and using the CLE framework. This qualitative research methodology affirmed these leaders and deepened the findings. Any researcher can and should benefit from using the CLE framework as a guide in developing their study design. Specifically, the CLE axioms center learning and leadership as socially dynamic processes and conversations as critical pedagogical processes, and the people closest to the issues are best situated to discover solutions to local concerns.

Deepening the understanding of how leaders can plan collaborative spaces to build trust and coherence is an area ripe for exploration. The scope of this study was three central office administrators and school leaders from three schools in an urban Northern California school district with 30,000 students. We found that the Critical Levers increase trust and coherence within this scope. This finding illustrates how school leaders can attend to the critical considerations of trust and coherence. A fruitful area of further study would be to use the CLE and improvement science frameworks to study how these six Critical Levers function in other schools, districts, and outside of the educational realm.

Although the findings of this study are valid and conclusive, I would like to have a broader data set. Part of this desire stems from the issues associated with conducting a school study during COVID-19 and the relatively small sample size. Due to COVID-19 restrictions in California, this study took place virtually. While I planned ways to approximate the connections

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one can make in person, I wonder how this project would have progressed with more in-person collaboration. Attendance at the Learning Exchanges, at the heart of this study, was lower than I had expected. I have known the leaders who joined this project for years, and they all expressed enthusiasm when agreeing to participate in the study. I was surprised by the attendance issues, and I believe this is related to the nature of public education since the pandemic shutdown. Leaders are overwhelmed, and even positive collaboration was difficult for them to attend.

A further study into how these six Critical Levers function in different arenas would be a fruitful exploration. While I believe the findings to be widely applicable, the results from this study are limited in scope. Educational leaders in other settings may experience building trust and coherence differently in their context. While the findings should extend beyond the educational sphere, the data from this study is indicative but not conclusive to broader organization theory.

The findings from this study indicate other possible inquiry questions. How do state and county policies affect trust and coherence in districts? How do trust and coherence overlap and impact educators' well-being? What correlation exists between higher levels of trust in the classroom and student outcomes? How do increased feelings of trust and coherence affect educators' willingness to engage in innovative practices? These are simply a few of the questions that surface for further inquiry.

**Leadership Development**

Two and a half years after the initial meeting that prompted me to explore trust and coherence, I participated in another central office meeting. This meeting reminded me of my feelings during the meeting that prompted this study. The agenda's goal was to address the perception of a lack of alignment. The task was filling out a spreadsheet showing how the work

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we engage in achieves the department goals we set. In isolation, this was an appropriate task. However, the task felt repetitive and insulting when judged through the lens of having been asked to fill in different versions of this sheet with varying goals over a year. The leaders in the meeting were losing trust in central office leadership by being asked to complete a task that felt like busy work. We decreased coherence by engaging in multiple tasks aiming at greater alignment.

After two and half years of working on a study focused on how central office administrators and school leaders build trust and coherence, I had a much more nuanced experience with the meeting. I still felt the frustration of the leaders in the room. I received a couple of offline texts making snarky remarks about the work. I saw the disengagement of leaders answering emails. I also saw how the structure of the meeting brought people into proximity but not into the Proximity that I uncovered as a Critical Lever through analyzing the data from this study. The practices welcome all into a space and create the Proximity that nurtures educators, making them feel Supported. Those practices and that feeling of support can lead to feelings of safety and Vulnerability.

Similarly, I saw how, although there was a strong vision of alignment, leaders in the room did not understand that vision. We all understood that we were supposed to align, but how and why was unclear. It felt like leaders were asking us to fit aspects of our work into boxes to benefit a leader's understanding, not the other educators or the work itself. Therefore, we were drawing ourselves further away from Coherence.

This study's focus of practice was how central office and school administrators build trust and coherence. The answer to that has emerged in the data simply by attending to the necessary conditions. More specifically, I found six Critical Levers I will use to build Trust and

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Coherence. My work in this study validates the initial assertion that Trust and Coherence are central considerations for any educational leader. This study drills down to specific practices that I will take as a leader to bolster my work as a central office administrator.

My growth relates to the findings of this study and my associated greater understanding of educational organizations and how nurturing spaces bolster personal relationships and strengthen the Trust and Coherence necessary for a thriving institution at every level. My growth as a leader also grew through engaging in the study. At times, I found the process uncomfortable. This discomfort is related to my wish to design a study that will benefit those involved. I sometimes felt like I might be calling people together for the benefit of my work and not for the betterment of participants and the organization. Designing Learning Exchanges and asking people to come together to investigate what I think is essential was intensely vulnerable. Through this vulnerability, I have grown. I find that I am much more willing to engage in uncomfortable spaces.

Fullan and Quinn (2016) speak to the importance of creating a solid vision and implementing it to iterate and tweak it as necessary. Bryk et al. (2015) address the need for leaders to engage in vulnerable rounds of iteration. My work on this study embedded me in these cycles of inquiry and pushed the boundaries of my comfort, knowledge, and skills. I have found this work profoundly transformative and look forward to using my growth to improve public education for the rest of my career.

This study was born during that meeting, where central office administrators called site leaders together to create greater alignment. The outcome of the meeting was to lessen trust and coherence because the goal of the meeting was to communicate a compliance measure. Leaders ignored trust, and although strict alignment can be a facet of coherence, it is short-sighted. If I

were to design that space now, I would utilize the learning from this study. I would use the practices defined as Proximity in this study to build Support and Vulnerability and increase trust. I would set a strong Vision beyond simple compliance, Align resources, and create Systems of support. I will be a better leader moving forward by attending to the Critical Levers.

## Conclusion

Throughout my 20 years working in the same community, I have striven to keep equity centered in all aspects of my work. In the Fall of 2020, I began a new role as a central office administrator. One of my first acts was presiding over a meeting where central office leaders layered a compliance system over schools implementing alternative curricula. The meeting struck me as an example of how we recreate inequitable outcomes in the name of greater equity through hierarchical control. It made me analyze my thoughts about the relationship between the central office and school leaders. I witnessed the hyper-focus on alignment decreasing trust and the intended coherence.

I began to design this study to get to the heart of how central office and school administrators build trust and coherence. The school leaders in that meeting leveraged their resources and political capital to find, adopt, and implement alternative curricula that they felt met the needs of their students. What could have been a meaningful exercise of trying to better understand the decision-making and structures of local innovations became a bureaucratic directive to have the leaders show how they fit into an ill-defined prescriptive box.

I designed this study to address a significant equity issue. The leaders in the meeting were trying to find and implement the best materials for their community. The central office is trying to choose and implement curricula that best serve 30,000 students in 56 schools across six cities. These are big tasks and there are different views on how to proceed.

By bringing together three central office administrators and the leaders from three schools, I deepened my understanding of how leaders build trust and coherence between and among school leaders and central office administrators. The co-practitioner researcher group and I isolated six Critical Levers to increase trust and coherence. As I moved through the coding process to collapsing into categories and themes, I realized that we were finding actions that leaders can take to increase these two fundamental themes. For this reason, I chose to name the categories levers to connote using them to shift the two broad themes of Trust and Coherence.

The data from this study and existing research indicate that the three Critical Levers—Proximity, Support, and Vulnerability—will increase trust, lead to more significant innovation, and improve equitable student outcomes. Leaders can build trust by attending to the Critical Levers within their spheres of influence. By focusing on Proximity, which is bringing people together to engage in collaborative activities that nurture connection and relationship, leaders can increase the feelings of Support. This increase in feelings of support makes educators more willing to engage in vulnerable activities (Vulnerability).

Organizations that operate coherently are more likely to succeed at their goals. Education is no exception to this rule. However, the loosely coupled nature of schools makes building coherence more complicated. The findings in this study can act as a framework for how leaders can build coherence. Vision, Alignment, and Systems are the three Critical Levers for increasing coherence. The data from this study show that leaders who attend to these three Critical Levers will build greater coherence. This increase in coherence can lead to the district operating more smoothly and improving the outcomes of all stakeholders.

I decided to pursue my doctorate to better understand how districts function and how I can improve the outcomes in my community. I decided on this focus of practice because it was

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apparent to me that the central office often was not improving the conditions for school leaders to accomplish their goals. By designing activities and analyzing the data in this study, I verified that Trust and Coherence are vital Themes in school improvement. I also uncovered six Critical Levers that leaders could use to increase trust and coherence. I named this dissertation *Greater Than the Parts* to capture the idea of building something greater as a whole than the constituent parts. The findings of this study indicate that by using the six Critical Levers to increase trust and coherence, leaders can build an organization that is greater than that achieved when the same actors are working with lesser levels of those critical conditions. I will use this study's findings to continue growing as an educator and build trust and coherence between and among schools and the central office in whatever roles I may have in the future.

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# APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

## IRB: Study Correspondence Letter

umcirb@ecu.edu <umcirb@ecu.edu>
Mon 09/20/2021 01:23 PM
To: Chilcott, Gabriel <chilcottg19@students.ecu.edu>

**EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY**
**University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board**
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** ·
rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

## Notification of Exempt Certification

| | |
|---|---|
| From: | Social/Behavioral IRB |
| To: | Gabriel Chilcott |
| CC: | Matthew Militello |
| Date: | 9/20/2021 |
| Re: | UMCIRB 21-001715 |
| | GREATER THAN THE PARTS: How school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust |

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 9/20/2021. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 1 & 2ab.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

| Document | Description |
|---|---|
| Chilcott Interview Script IRB Proposal.pdf(0.01) | Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions |
| Chilcott IRB Study Proposal.pdf(0.01) | Study Protocol or Grant Application |
| Chilcott.Study.Email.Invitation.pdf(0.01) | Recruitment Documents/Scripts |
| Informed Consent to Participate in Research Updated.pdf(0.01) | Consent Forms |

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418
IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

—

Study.PI Name:
Study.Co-Investigators:

# APPENDIX B: COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE CERTIFICATE

Completion Date 02-Jan-2021
Expiration Date 02-Jan-2024
Record ID 40141521

This is to certify that:

**Gabriel Chilcott**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

**Human Research**
(Curriculum Group)
**Group 2.Social / Behavioral Research Investigators and Key Personnel**
(Course Learner Group)
**1 - Basic Course**
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

**East Carolina University**

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?weaecaa6c-c95b-422c-b488-db08fe9e94ca-40141521

# APPENDIX C: DISTRICT PERMISSION LETTER

**WEST CONTRA COSTA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**
1108 Bissell Avenue | Richmond, CA 94801-3135
Office: (510) 231-1101 | Fax: (510) 236-6784
www.wccusd.net

**Kenneth C. Hurst Sr., Ed.D.**
Superintendent

August 25, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

West Contra Costa School District recognizes the benefits of participating in relevant, well-designed research studies proposed by qualified individuals. Approval for conducting such studies is based primarily on the extent to which substantial benefits can be shown for WCCUSD Schools and its mission of educating students. The purpose of this letter is to notify you of the **approval** to conduct your dissertation study titled, greater than the parts: How school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust with participants in our schools. We also give permission to utilize space in district offices and schools to collect data and conduct interviews for his dissertation project.

The project meets all of our school/district guidelines, procedures, and safeguards for conducting research on our campus. Moreover, there is ample space for Gabriel Chilcott to conduct his study and his project will not interfere with any functions of WCCUSD. Finally, the following conditions must be met, as agreed upon by the researchers and WCCUSD:

- Participant data only includes information captured from the state data collection strategies.
- Participation is voluntary.
- Participants can choose to leave the study without penalty at any time.
- Any issues with participation in the study are reported to the school administration in a timely manner.
- An executive summary of your findings is shared with the school administration once the study is complete.

In addition to these conditions, the study must follow all of the East Carolina University IRB guidelines.

We are excited to support this important work.

Respectfully,

Kenneth C. Hurst Sr., Ed.D.
Superintendent

## Informed Consent to Participate in Research
Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: Greater than the parts: How school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust

Principal Investigator: Gabriel Chilcott under the guidance of Dr. Matthew Militello
Institution, Department or Division: College of Education
Address: 220 Ragsdale, ECU, Greenville, NC 27858
Telephone #: (919) 518 – 4008

**Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) and West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.**
**Why am I being invited to take part in this research?**

The purpose of this research is to explore how coherence and trust is built between and among different levels of a California public school district and how these factors contribute to innovation. You are being invited to take part in this research because you are a central office administrator, site administrator, or site instructional coach in West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD). The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn how do school leaders and central office administrators build coherence and trust between and among each other in order to create the conditions necessary to reimagine the policies, practices, and procedures needed to support adopting and implementing an alternative math curriculum?

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about 8-10 people to do so.

**Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?**
There are no known reasons for why you should not participate in this research study.
**What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?**
You can choose not to participate.
**Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?**
The research will be conducted in WCCUSD schools. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study will not exceed 15 hours for school and district leaders over the next two years.
**What will I be asked to do?**
If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to participate in the following:
- Team meetings every six weeks and complete reflective memos after each session.
- Interviews with the principal researcher (recorded for analysis)
- Co-lead two Community Learning Exchange professional learning sessions.
- Participate in two Community Learning Exchange professional learning sessions.

**What might I experience if I take part in the research?**

We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

**Will I be paid for taking part in this research?**

We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.


**Will it cost me to take part in this research?**

It will not cost you any money to be a part of this research.

**Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?**

ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates human research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the North Carolina Department of Health, and the Office for Human Research Protections.
- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.


**How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?**

The information in the study will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Consent forms and data from interviews and focus groups will be maintained in a secure, locked location and will be stored for a minimum of three years after completion of the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.



**What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?**

You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop, and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

**Who should I contact if I have questions?**

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator Gabriel Chilcott, Director of Secondary Education, WCCUSD. gchilcott@wccusd.net

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director for Human Research Protections at 252-744-2914.

**I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?**

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following, and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.

- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.


_____    _____
**Participant's Name  (PRINT)**                    **Signature**                    **Date**

**Person Obtaining Informed Consent**:  I have conducted the initial informed consent process.  I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above and answered all of the person's questions about the research.


_____
**Person Obtaining Consent  (PRINT)**          **Signature**          **Date**

**APPENDIX E: EMAIL INVITATION**

 Hello (_____),

I am seeking participants for a participatory action research project. I am looking forward to studying how central office administrators and site leaders build coherence and trust. Specifically, I hope to work with school leaders implementing Illustrative Mathematics as an alternative curriculum. Ideally, I'm looking for three site leader teams.

This is a research project leading to my doctoral degree. Therefore, I am seeking colleagues who are willing to volunteer to serve as Co-practitioner Researchers. We will work together through three cycles of inquiry to learn and understand ways to build coherence and trust between central office administrators and school site leaders. I will collect and analyze data related to the research questions using established protocols.

This research project will span the 2021-22 school year and conclude in the fall of 2022. Although this work is related to district curriculum protocols and policies, the project is separate from your contracted duties and will not be part of any professional evaluation and you will not be compensated for your work. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and with no penalty.

If you are interested in participating and working with me on my study, please let me know. We will set up a meeting to review the consent forms and I will provide more details about the study. Also, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 510-684-3565 or gchilcott@wccusd.net.

Thank you,

Gabe

# APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
## Interview Protocol

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me today. This interview will be semi-structured and last no more than an hour.

My name is Gabriel Chilcott. I am researching as a graduate student at East Carolina University. The interview is part of a study to explore how central office administrators and site leaders build coherence and trust.

Disclosures:
- Your participation in the study is <u>voluntary</u>. It is your decision whether or not to participate, and you may elect to stop participating in the interview at any time.
- The interview will be <u>digitally recorded</u> to capture a comprehensive record of our conversation.
- All information collected will be kept <u>confidential</u>. Any information collected during the session that may identify any participant will not be disclosed without your prior permission. I will use a coding system with no names or school identifiers associated with the recorded discussions.

**Interview Questions**

**TURN RECORDER ON AND STATE THE FOLLOWING:**
**"My name is Gabriel Chilcott, and I will be interviewing (*Participant Code)* on *(Date)* for *Greater than the Parts* study."**

Interview:

*The first interview only*: To begin the conversation, please introduce yourself, give your preferred pronouns, birthdate, and describe your role at the school. What are your initial thoughts about participating in this study?

1. How are you doing today?
   a. Has there been anything noteworthy in the time since we last spoke?

2. How is the implementation of Illustrative Mathematics going at your site?

3. Does implementation feel coherent with everyone pulling in the same direction?
   a. To what do you attribute the level of coherence?

4. How have you built trust with the implementation process?
   a. Do you feel that this has contributed to higher levels of trust overall?

5. How has central office support affected your work implementing IM?
   a. How has this support affected coherence?
   b. How has this support affected trust?

6. How are you collaborating with other leaders to improve your implementation plan?
   a. How has this support affected coherence?
   b. How has this support affected trust?

Closing Script:

Thank you so much for your time today. Before we close, is there anything you would like to add to the conversation?

**Local Agency/Curricular Flexibility**
**Learning Exchange**
11/18/2020
10:00am - 11:30am

**Zoom Link**

**Outcomes:**
- Build Relational Trust
- Tell Our Stories
- Explore Possible Scope of the Work
- Name the Challenges and Assets

**Norms**
- Equity of Voice
  - During discussion, if you have spoken once, please provide space for two others to speak before speaking again.
- Challenge ideas/not people
- Seek to understand

| Time | Agenda | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| 10:00 | **Welcome And Setting the Stage**<br>- Norms<br>- Outcomes<br>- Cultural Learning Exchange Axioms | |
| 10:05 | **Dynamic Mindfulness**<br>- ABC + Trauma Informed | - Resources for your use:<br>https://learn.niroga.org/courses/dmind-level1-selfpaced<br><br>- https://www.youtube.com/user/NirogaInstitute |
| 10:10 | **Personal Narrative**<br>- Tell a story of a time you created something that benefited your students/community. How did you feel? What do you think made you think of this example? Break into pairs.<br>- Group Share | Capture Themes in Chat |

| 10:25 | **_Why Are We Here?_**<br>• Framing the possible work<br>• EdD<br>• Honoring all the work | |
|---|---|---|
| 10:30 | **_Backwards Forward Historical Context_**<br>• What internal dynamics/challenges led to you to this change? What assets were you able to harness?<br>• District Challenges and Assets<br>• Larger System Challenges and Assets<br>• Think Matching Protocol | Fishbone Outline<br><br>Matching Jamboard<br><br>Chilcott Initial Fishbone |
| 10:55 | **_Meeting Structure, Possible COPs, Etc._**<br>• Driving the school work forward<br>• Driving the district work forward<br>• Focus of Practice for this group and beyond | How can we work together for the next few years? |
| 11:10 | **_Next Steps:_**<br><br>• | Meeting Feedback Form |
| 11:20 | **_Good of the Order_** | |

**TK-8th Grade INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS FLEXIBILITY and CHOICE**

**WCCUSD EDUCATIONAL SERVICES**
**2020-2021**

July 23, 2020

To: ▮▮▮▮ Principal: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
From: ▮▮▮▮▮, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
Re: Curricular Flexibility and Choice

Thank you for your application for Curricular Flexibility and Choice. Your proposal has been approved. We are excited to offer school site options to SUPPLEMENT District adopted core instructional materials to meet identified learning needs of students.

Our goal for establishing and communicating this process is two-fold: 1) to provide site leaders with clear guidelines to identify supplemental materials to implement at the site level and 2) to ensure that all sites have the option to participate in curricular innovation with guidance and accountability from Educational Services.

As part of your application, you have committed to a 2 year adoption cycle. Site level funding is required to support the purchase of materials for Flexibility. Title 1 Funds may be used to supplement the Board adopted materials at Title 1 schools. Sites must also continue to maintain Board adopted core curriculum accessibility for all students to uphold our Williams settlement. Documentation that supports your site level adoption of supplemental materials must also be kept on file representative of consultation with faculty and parents and/or students (agenda. sign-in, evaluations, google surveys).

To support our new Core District adoption for Elementary Literacy, sites will be granted a level of waiver.
Your site has been granted a Level 3 waiver, which means you will implement 25% of the board adopted curriculum with 100% fidelity, and have flexibility to supplement for 75%. See chart below for detail on components implemented based on level of waiver.

| Level of Waiver | Level of Implementation of Board Adopted Curricula | Level of Supplement | Component of the Board adopted Curriculum the Site will implement with 100% Fidelity | Component of the Supplemental tool that will be utilized |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| NONE Level 0 | 100% | 0% | Reading Workshop with Units of Study (50%) Writing Workshop with Units of Study (25%) Phonics Workshop with Units of Study (25%) | NA |
| Waiver level 1 | 75% | 25% | Writing Workshop with Units of Study (25%) Reading Workshop with Units of Study (50%) | Phonics Materials (25%) |
| Waiver level 2 | 50% | 50% | Writing Workshop with Units of Study (25%) Phonics Workshop with Units of Study (25%) | Reading Materials (50%) |
| Waiver level 3 | 25% | 75% | Writing Workshop with Units of Study (25%) | Reading Materials (50%) Phonics Materials (25%) |

The District will maintain a data tracking system to review the progress of students at sites that are implementing site level supplemental curriculum in Literacy and Math, and the expectation is that sites with a waiver will outpace schools with similar demographics in order to continue with the waiver beyond two years.

A constant challenge for site leaders is to meet the needs of their unique student population with the allotted resources. During the past few years, various site leaders have sought supplemental staff development and curricular support, in addition to that provided district-wide. In the midst of these unprecedented times when differentiating instruction and access to multiple resources are a necessity, site leaders continue to consider available curricular resources to supplement the district adopted materials for Math and Literacy instruction. In order to ensure equity, we have streamlined the process that campuses follow to use supplemental materials to support core instruction.

Thank you for your leadership and for your commitment to engaging, challenging, and empowering learning experiences for our students. For additional clarification please reach out to me directly at ██████@wccusd.net.

Site commitments are outlined in the guidance document below:

**WCCUSD TK-8 INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS CURRICULUM FLEXIBILITY AND CHOICE 2020-2021**

| Program | Curriculum Flexibility and Choice- SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS |
|---|---|
| Process and Criteria | There is one official District adopted curriculum for Elementary Literacy and Math and then flexibility.<br><br>Sites may engage in a curricular review process based on the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA), CA Instructional Materials Adoption Toolkits for English Language Arts- Literacy- ELD- Biliteracy and Mathematics to identify site level adoption of Supplemental materials. The principal must engage a site based representative committee in a review process about the options, the commitment, the selection process, and timeline. The committee will recommend Supplemental curriculum based on each school's agreement with the District, and a site level professional development and assessment plan. |
| Materials and Funding | Sites commit to a 2 year adoption cycle. Site level funding is used to support purchase of materials for Flexibility. Title 1 Funds may be used to supplement the Board-adopted materials at Title 1 schools. |
| Classroom Libraries and Math Manipula-tives | Sites are responsible for funding and maintaining supplemental curriculum resources that exist in addition to Core Adopted WCCUSD materials, including classroom libraries and supplemental Math resources. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Professional Development | Sites will provide professional development to all staff implementing supplemental materials for Curriculum Flexibility. |
| Selection Criteria | Alignment with the CA ELA/ELD Standards and CA Mathematics Standards<br>Program Organization<br>Assessment<br>Universal Access<br>Instructional Planning and Teacher Support<br>English Language Development<br>Biliteracy<br>Deeper Learning |
| Accountability | Student progress toward identified academic goals will be measured and communicated 2-3 times annually. SPSAs will be reviewed and updated to meet the identified student needs and provide interventions using identified supplemental materials.<br><br>The District reserves the right to deny the request for supplemental instructional materials if the school is not showing adequate growth/progress in academic goals. |
| Notes: | Williams schools must continue to maintain Board-approved Core Curriculum materials. |

**Illustrative Mathematics Learning Exchange**
10/19/21
3:30-4:45 pm

**Link to GMeet**

**Outcomes:**
- Build Relational Trust
- Narrate Our Experiences
- Understand the scope of the proposed collaboration
- Explore our own and other people's alternative curriculum journey

**Norms**
- Seek to understand & avoid making assumptions
- Pay attention to and encourage equitable participation
- Be on time
- Find patience for your and others' learning

| Time | Agenda | Notes |
|------|--------|-------|
| 3:30 | *Welcome and Setting the Stage*<br>• Norms<br>• Outcomes<br>• Agenda Additions | |
| 3:35 | *Dynamic Mindfulness*<br><br>• | |
| 3:40 | *Personal Narrative*<br>• Intro<br>• School & Role<br>• What does the term curriculum mean to you? Why is it important? How does it affect the lives of our students?<br>• | 4m Think time<br>Whip around<br>Discuss as whole group |
| 3:50 | *My Proposal & Goals*<br>• The core mission of public education happens in schools. The Central Office can help or hinder this mission. How do we work together to foster innovation? | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Among other more specific goals, this project is about creating a space to slow down and listen to each other. | |
| | • *If* coherence and trust are built between and among school leaders and central office administrators to create the conditions necessary to reimagine policies, practices, and procedures that support the adoption and implementation of an alternative mathematics curriculum, *then* the required conditions that foster innovation will improve. | |
| | • I aim to build coherence and trust by bringing together a group of site leaders (principals, vice principals, and instructional coaches) and central office administrators. | |
| | • The group will work together to map existing protocols and create coherent systems for adopting and implementing alternative curricula. This participatory action research (PAR) project will be three successive cycles of inquiry from Fall 2021-Fall 2022. | |
| | • The first PAR cycle will focus on mapping current structures, and the second and third cycles will center on implementation strategies and data collection and analysis strategies. | |
| | • The CPR will use the learning in these cycles to consider policies, practices, and procedures that inform district structures of autonomy in the curricula. | |
| 4:00 | ***Your Alternative Curriculum Journey*** <br> • What was the beginning of this journey? What did you see that made you feel a shift was needed? <br> • What did you do to get started? <br> • How did you enlist support? From whom? From the district? <br> • How did district support or lack thereof feel? <br> • Planning, implementing, measuring? <br> • Levels of Data | Break into Rooms by School (Central Office-1/room or own room?) <br> <u>Helms Journey Map</u> <br> <u>Nystrom Journey Map</u> <br> <u>Peres Journey Map</u> <br><br> Gallery Walk <br><br> Look at the Map and consider who helped or hampered this innovation. Especially Central Office. Place notes to represent places where this was felt. Or the absence of help was felt. |
| 4:20 | ***Setting the Stage*** <br> • 1:1 <br> • Curriculum Reflective Memo <br> • November Meeting <br> • January? <br> • February and March | What would be useful for you, your team, and your community? |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 4:40 | *Closing* | |

# APPENDIX J: CODEBOOK

| Category | Code | Key Definitions |
|---|---|---|
| Coherence | vision | Evidence of how a leader creates and articulates goals to the school community |
| Coherence | alignment | Evidence of actions taken to make practices and implementation intentionally support intended goals and outcomes. In the context of education, alignment can be broadly defined as the degree to which the components of an education system—such as standards, curricula, assessments, and instruction—work together to achieve desired goals (Ananda, 2003; Resnick, Rothman, Slattery, & Vranek, 2003; Webb, 1997b) |
| Coherence | curriculum | |
| Coherence | systems | Reference to structures put in place to support the implementation of organizational goals |
| Coherence | churn | The dissonance caused by turnover of educators at all levels. Adapted from Leverett (2002). |
| Coherence | institutional knowledge | |
| Coherence | instructional core | |
| Coherence | feedback | |
| Trust | Benevolence | Trust: Benevolence is the assurance that the other will not exploit one's vulnerability. |
| Trust | Reliability | Trust: Reliability is the extent to which someone can accomplish expectations. |
| Trust | Competence | Trust: Competence is the belief that others are able to accomplish what they promise. |
| Trust | Honesty | Trust: Honesty is exhibited when events match prior expectations/promises and when future commitments are honored. |
| Trust | Openness | Trust: Openness is the extent to which information is shared. |
| Trust | Vulnerability | Trust: Vulnerability is the act of risking detrimental outcomes such as poor student performance, professional embarrassment, judgment, or formal criticism. Vulnerability is necessary in pursuing shared goals (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2018). |
| Trust | Proximity | Reference to evidence that people being in the same space (physical or virtual) can lead to greater trust. Expansion from later data to include broader idea of how leaders can create spaces that nurture educators and increase levels of trust. |

| Trust | Commiserate | Trust: Commiserate is the act of sympathizing with others, which can build empathy for another's experience. |
|---|---|---|
| Trust | Communication | |
| Support | validation | In the context of this project, I define support as how leaders create conditions that lead to and sustain positive mental health in educators, help educators achieve professional goals, and ease obstacles. |
| Support | mental health | |
| Support | lack of | |
| Support | C.O. Support | |
| Support | Adult Learning | |
| Support | Ease/Obstacle | The positive and negative codes associated with either the removal or placing of barriers to school improvement efforts. |
| Support | Sustain | Support-Sustain for the context of this project as interactions or activities that enervate leaders by centering the experiences that make education meaningful to them |
| Support | Communication | |

Pre-Cycle Data

| Category | Code | Secondary Category | Magnitude | Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Coherence | vision | v | high | 12 |
| Coherence | alignment | a | high | 12 |
| Coherence | curriculum | s | medium | 11 |
| Coherence | systems | s | medium | 8 |
| Coherence | churn | l-o | medium | 8 |
| Coherence | institutional knowledge | v | low | 5 |
| Coherence | instructional core | v | medium | 6 |
| Coherence | feedback | s | low | 5 |
| Trust | Benevolence | | low | 1 |
| Trust | Reliability | | low | 2 |
| Trust | Competence | | medium | 8 |
| Trust | Honesty | | low | 1 |
| Trust | Openness | | low | 2 |
| Trust | Vulnerability | v | low | 2 |
| Trust | Proximity | p | medium | 9 |
| Trust | Commiserate | p | low | 4 |
| Trust | Communication | | low | 5 |

| Category | Code | | Magnitude | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Support | validation | | low | 7 |
| Support | mental health | | low | 5 |
| Support | lack of | | high | 13 |
| Support | C.O. Support | | high | 13 |
| Support | Adult Learning | and v | medium | 8 |
| Support | Ease/Obstacle | | medium | 10 |
| Support | Sustain | s | low | 3 |
| Support | Communication | | low | 6 |
| Innovation | autonomy | | medium | 10 |
| Innovation | agency | | low | 5 |
| Innovation | School Improvement | v | low | 4 |
| innovation | curriculum | rigor--v | medium | 10 |

Cycle One Data

| Category | Code | Magnitude | Total Frequency | 1:1 Frequency | LE Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Coherence | vision | medium | 9 | 4 | 5 |
| Coherence | alignment | high | 10 | 6 | 4 |
| Coherence | curriculum | medium | 8 | 6 | 2 |
| Coherence | systems | high | 13 | 11 | 2 |
| Coherence | churn | high | 14 | 9 | 5 |
| Coherence | institutional knowledge | low | 6 | 4 | 2 |
| Coherence | instructional core | low | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Coherence | feedback | low | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Trust | Benevolence | low | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Trust | Reliability | low | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Trust | Competence | low | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| Trust | Honesty | low | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Trust | Openness | low | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Trust | Vulnerability | medium | 7 | 0 | 7 |
| Trust | Proximity | high | 10 | 6 | 4 |
| Trust | Commiserate | high | 13 | 7 | 6 |
| Trust | Communication | low | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| Support | validation | high | 13 | 2 | 11 |
| Support | mental health | low | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Support | lack of | high | 14 | 6 | 8 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Support | C.O. Support | high | 15 | 8 | 7 |
| Support | Adult Learning | low | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Support | Ease/Obstacle | medium | 7 | 2 | 5 |
| Support | Sustain | low | 6 | 6 | 0 |
| Support | Communication | | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| Innovation | autonomy | high | 12 | 4 | 8 |
| Innovation | agency | medium | 9 | 4 | 5 |
| Innovation | school improvement | low | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| innovation | curriculum rigor | medium | 7 | 3 | 4 |

Cycle Two Data

| Trust Personal Narrative | |
|---|---|
| Critical Lever | Frequency |
| Proximity | 8 |
| Support | 6 |
| Vulnerability | 5 |
| Coherence Learning Exchange | |
| Critical Lever | Frequency |
| Vision | 8 |
| Alignment | 5 |
| Systems | 4 |
| Proximity | 6 |
| Support | 5 |

# APPENDIX K: LEARNING EXCHANGE AGENDA 02/08/22

**Illustrative Mathematics Learning Exchange**
2/08/22
3:30-4:45 pm

**<u>Link to GMeet</u>**

**<u>Previous Agenda</u>**
**Outcomes:**
- Build Relational Trust
- Discuss Emerging Themes
- Better understanding of existing systems
- Begin to build new systems

**Norms**
- Seek to understand & avoid making assumptions
- Pay attention to and encourage equitable participation
- Be present and timely
- Find patience for your and others learning

| Time | Agenda | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| 3:30 | ***Welcome and Setting the Stage***<br>• Norms<br>• Outcomes<br>• Taqtic-A GMeet transcript add-on feature<br>• Agenda Additions | |
| 3:35 | ***Dynamic Mindfulness***<br>• | |
| 3:40 | ***Personal Narrative***<br>5m-Read through the following.<br>Discuss with a partner your initial thoughts<br>Questions? Areas of Resonance? Anything that seems off?<br>• Emerging Themes: These are some of the themes that may be emerging early in my data sorting and coding.<br>  ○ Trust | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | ■ Proximity: Building spaces for educators to come together<br>■ Commiserate: Sometimes just being able to vent and know others are in the same space is cathartic and beneficial to the work.<br>■ Communication: Can be of great benefit or an impediment<br>○ Coherence<br>■ Vision: Clear vision and mission can help the leader get people moving in the same direction.<br>■ Alignment: Aligning adult learning, resources, time, etc., is important to achieving goals.<br>■ Churn: The continued changes in personnel (admin, teacher-leaders, teachers) make coherence difficult. Have to rebuild culture through time-consuming, mindful onboarding.<br>○ Support<br>■ The lack of: People are feeling a distinct lack of support across the board.<br>■ Central Office-or the lack thereof: Unsure of the weight of this theme, as some of my questions are C.O.-centric and may skew the conversation.<br>■ Ease/obstacle: Systems or the lack thereof can make things easier or harder. This is felt at sites; HR/staffing being the most common example.<br>■ Mental health: Not quite this as the overarching theme, I think … | |
| 3:50 | ***Initial Takeaways and Setting the Stage***<br><br>● I very much like Illustrative Mathematics and Desmos, but this is intended to be about curricular flexibility, not any particular curriculum.<br>● The goal of aligning the District around one curriculum has been stated. Not official, but clear that there is strong interest in moving that direction.<br>● The problem with the existing system may be that it was built through the lens of compliance to capture the freedom to innovate that was already granted. And it is not really felt as a system.<br>● We have all experienced the cycles of forward movement and regression that can seem inherent in education. | |
| 3:55 | ***Our Current 'System'***<br>● Overarching Reality: There are no alternative curricula.<br>● Williams compliance is paramount.<br>● And yet ... how do we create space for some level of curricular flexibility? | Math Additional Programs<br><br>WCCUSD TK-8 Instructional Materials Curriculum Flexibility 2021-2022 |
| 4:20 | ***Critiquing and Rebuilding the System*** | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | ● What needs to be considered?<br>● Read through Hurst's Strategic Vetting and Laurie's adaptation<br>● Are we prioritizing the right things?<br>● How would you have answered these questions at the beginning of your journey? Now? | Hurst's Strategic Vetting Deck<br><br>Laurie's Pilot Version of Strategic Vetting (Draft) |
| | ***Bringing Data to the Next Meeting***<br>● Bring your internal data sets.<br>● We'll collaborate to compare with District, like school, and among the participating schools.<br>● I will then use this work to coordinate how the District supports alternative curriculum moving forward.<br>● The narrative of complete autonomy without structures to judge the efficacy of curricula needs to be countered with clear systems. | |
| 4:40 | ***Closing*** | Informed Consent to Participate in Research |

# APPENDIX L: LEARNING EXCHANGE AGENDA 03/08/22

**Illustrative Mathematics Learning Exchange**
3/08/22
3:30-4:45 pm

**Link to GMeet**
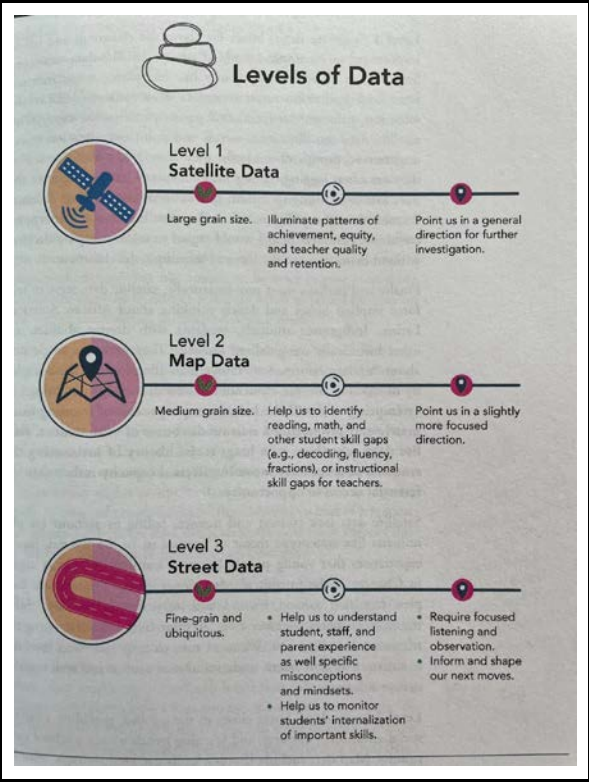
**Previous Agenda**
**Outcomes:**
- Build Relational Trust
- Calibrate Data Levels
- Share data sets between schools
- Consider data in the emerging system

**Norms**
- Seek to understand & avoid making assumptions
- Pay attention to and encourage equitable participation
- Be present and timely
- Find patience for your and others' learning

| Time | Agenda | Notes |
|------|--------|-------|
| 3:30 | ***Welcome and Setting the Stage***<br>• Norms<br>• Outcomes<br>• Taqtic-Transcripting add-on<br>• Agenda Additions | |

| | |  |
|---|---|---|
| 3:35 | *Dynamic Mindfulness*<br>● | |
| 3:40 | *Personal Narrative (Jamboard)*<br>● Where do we spend our time considering and discussing data?<br>● Put a yellow sticky note with the percentage of time spent at each level.<br>● Add in the specific data sets that you engage with at each level.<br>● Put a pink sticky note with the percentage of your data time you think should be spent at each level<br>● Whip around: What percentage did you put? Why? Any surprises?<br>● Group discussion:<br>   ○ Why did you choose the optimal percentage you did?<br>   ○ What does this tell us about our data systems?<br>   ○ Are we looking at the right things?<br>   ○ How do we change? | |
| 3:50 | *Satellite*<br>● Moment in Time STAR Renaissance Assessment Share<br>   ○ SGP Metric Comparison<br>● State BM Metric Comparison Longitudinal STAR Share (District Data Summit Pull)<br>   ○ SGP Math<br>   ○ State Benchmark Math | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 3:55 | *Map Level* <br> ● What local measures are you using and why? <br> ● What does this data tell you about your implementation of IM? | |
| 4:20 | *Street Level* <br> ● What are your goals for student experience? <br> ● How do you know if you are reaching these goals? | |
| | *Reflection & Next Steps* <br> ● How did this collaboration land for you? <br> ● Do you feel that you better understand others' experiences? <br> ● Would a version of this collaboration be beneficial if built into the district system? | |
| 4:40 | *Closing* | <u>Informed Consent to Participate in Research</u> |

Proximity-What are some experiences you can think of where you gathered with others in a way that helped you feel connected? How can we design our meetings to foster connection and trust?

Using the personal narrative to open meetings with a connection to participants' personal selves and the work to come.

Not too often, but often enough to break down the silos

As much as I hate meetings, we really do need to start building a team once again. Feel free to pass on kickball.

I feel most connected to folks when we can share a bit about work and a bit about our lives outside-of-work.

A clear agenda that is not too packed and allows time for people to engage with eachother.

In-person meeting occasionally? Maybe once/quarter or 3x per year?

I think it is important that we establish relationships individually. When meeting in a group setting, there is already the trust element. Having a agenda that clarifies what the intent of the meeting also helps.

Trust - I like knowing what will be on the agenda and what is expected of me to present/talk about during the meeting.

**Vulnerability-** What are some experiences in professional meetings where you foubnd yourself more willing to be vulnerable? To be more willing to put yourself out there? How can make everyone feel more comfortable to express themselves in these spaces?

When I feel like the people in the space are all working toward the same purpose.

Less feeling of alterior motives.

fishbowls or other problem of practice protocols?

When there's a format to bring up challenges in order to get ideas about how to handle/cricital feedback.

group activities?--poster paper...

The only time I was vulnerable with workmates was when my team were facing layoffs (and possibly homelessness). Gracie was actually great at meeting with us and giving us space to share.

**Support-**Can you think of examples of meetings that make you feel supported? How can we best design our time together to support each other?

When the reasons for the decisions that are made are clear. I may not agree with the decision, but I feel supported if I understand why another route was taken.

Time for Q&A; reviewing agenda and asking for additions as needed.

Meetings with IT and Curriculum have always left me feeling supported (esp. in Covid Times). It helps to know what others on my extended team are doing.

Discussion around clear communication of big district ideas, changes, logistics (Francie's example of learning things from Board Packets)

Having Gabe do an update of what's coming up, what's in the works. Etc.

Again - if I can poll the group for support/ideas.

# APPENDIX N. LEARNING EXCHANGE AGENDA 08/04/22 & JAMBOARD

**Data Sharing Learning Exchange**
08/04/22
3:30-4:430 pm

**Link to GMeet**
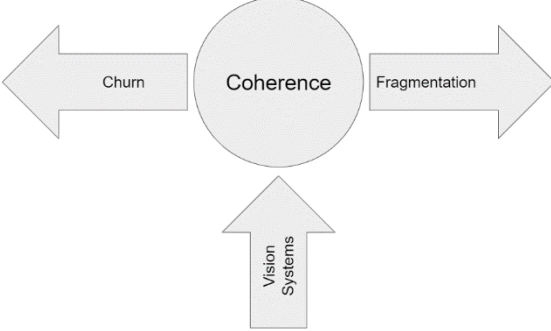
**Outcomes:**
- Build Relational Trust
- Celebrate our Product
- Share Findings

**Norms**
- **Seek to understand & avoid making assumptions**
- **Pay attention to and encourage equitable participation**
- **Be present and timely**
- **Find patience for yours and others learning**

| Time | Agenda | Notes |
|------|--------|-------|
| 3:30 | ***Welcome And Setting the Stage*** <br> • Norms <br> • Outcomes | |
| 3:35 | ***Personal Narrative*** <br> • <u>Revisit Goals of Management retreat</u> <br> • How did these days feel? Were the goals achieved? <br> • What symmetry is there between this opening and yours with your staff or department? How do you build trust and coherence? <br> • <u>Jamboard Page One</u> | |
| 3:45 | ***Piloting Instructional Materials Product*** <br> • <u>Instructional Material Review Responses</u> <br> • | |

| 4:00 | **_Emergent Coherence Findings_** |  |
|------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
|      | • Critical Levers for Coherence <br>     o Vision <br>     o Support <br>     o Churn <br>     o Fragmentation <br> • Jamboard Page Two | |
| 4:25 | **_Closing_** | <u>Informed Consent to Participate in Research</u> |

## What makes you feel connected to a meeting and more willing to engage? How do you build your meetings to build trust and coherence?

- Super sharing things that didn't work as well
- Can't be one off-how to we stay on the path and reinforce our opening words.
- Model vulnerability
- How do you balance the vision with the technical aspects of the work?
- How do you do tight loose? Set vision and tone. In the room you have people who are in there 20th version of this meeting and some who are there for the first time. How do we differentiate.
- Authenticity
- Tight/Loose structures. A clear agenda with built in time to collaborate and do the work.
- How are we taking care of each other
- Discussing the why
- Personal Narratives-Openings that attach to personal experience and bridge to the work at hand.

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## What have you experienced or do you build into your work and meetings to affect these levers?

### Alignment

- Walkthrough and Observation Expectations
- Alignment is often veiwed in the district as being in lock step as opposed to fullan who say alignment is about the vision, not the same practices.
- Accountability- is this a handslap or true co creation?
- the trust and connections pieces are woven together not seperate
- walkthroughs-do we see the people who are training us and asking us to do things-this is operational, but it also goes to trust.
- how is our board functioning? Championship teams-everyone is doing an extraordinary job. That is alignement-there is an excitement around the whole building. All working together
- Leadership training for all levels-board, CO, sites, etc

### Systems

- Consistent If then structures, including how to proceed if they break down.
- How do we judge the efficacy of what we are doing and offer supports to those who need it?
- Even the intent of having these conversations about change make it happen. Things are moving. Not one size fits all. that is hopeful
- Where were there more opportunities for dialogue-didn't feel like there was the space to brainstorm-went directly to planning in the small groups.
- We do so much for the ease of the adults-comfort and familiarity make us build the same things over and over
- the gravitiational pull - go back to the familiar
- will there be a cycle 2? What is going to happen next? We are setting these structures up, but is there going to be real follow up?
- You move out of the status quo by identifying the problem, planning for how to get out and then being brave and focused enough to do it

### Vision

- vision and accept the messy
- There is still a lot of work to do around SEL=Hattie's work makes it clear how important connection is-this came up and gave space
- There is often no narrative except my own.
- 3 Key areas of focus and goal setting.
- This is what we have to get done in August-what needs to get done to make that happen? For the kids and community.
- There have been many levers of change-try something else-iReady-

### Other

- Safety-belonging-identity-part of proximity-knowing who you are and how you fit. Feeling seen heard and
- Validated for wanting to try something else. Not just a good idea pat, but support through resources and action
- Ease and comfort-
- you take yourself everywhere you go. We need to do identity work to understand what we don't know.
- iready-I have a need and an idea and was supported
- Meyer briggs- do you like the structure of the familiar or do you thrive in novelty and change
- Got something and then you worked-got something and then you were with a group-the time was spent with more interaction
- culture-how is this going to look at your site? Felt space to build responsive practices to site to bring back.
- depth requires time and vulnerability.